

## Designing for chickens and other fowl

Chickens and other fowl can be beneficial in any yard, but planning makes life easier. The more variety you offer, the less damage will occur. Using “the right plant in the right place” rule is imperative. Choosing plants for your hardiness zone, microclimates and growing conditions will encourage plants resilient to chickens’ natural curiosity.

Layering plants – durable groundcovers under short flowers, shrubs and taller trees – will create a diverse habitat. Birds need places to escape from predators. Thick bushes with thorns can help when ground dwelling predators lurk. Fences, hedges, shrubs and trees fowl can run under help protect from aerial predators. Space these diversions throughout your yard for easy access. For less domesticated birds, underbrush is important nesting sites if you want hens to hatch eggs.

Creating a food forest of nut and fruit trees, vegetables, herbs, berries, seeds and vines will allow your birds to forage for some of their feed; occupying their time and minds; filling their diet, as well as yours, with diversity.

Hardscapes should be hoseable as birds will inevitably poop wherever they roam. Permeable paths and patios allow more water to soak in to soil, benefitting nearby plantings. Paths of 3” thick gravel with small, unwashed stones which pack well is an excellent choice, creating a firm, permeable footing difficult for chickens to scratch away.

Don’t forget the lawn. Instead of fighting for a pristine expanse of green, try an eco-lawn, a

mixture of grass and any broadleaf plant or weed, as long as it isn’t a noxious weed. This requires less maintenance, less herbicide and your birds can forage there. You will see how desperately chickens love greens when a small patch of grass is exposed from under the snow. They congregate there until it is picked clean. So don’t forget to give them greens, such as lettuce, cabbage or wheatgrass, in the winter.

A tree or shrub in their permanent run is appreciated, as this gives them shade in the hot summer. Choosing a variety with fruit or seeds will be an added bonus at harvest time.

Poisonous plants are rarely an issue in a lush, well-designed yard as birds will pass over these plants for something more desirable. Hungry, bored birds with no other options are the only ones who will risk nibbling these dangerous plants.

## Groundcovers

Fast-spreading, dense evergreen or herbaceous groundcovers best survive the attention of chickens.

- Berginia (*Bergenia cordifolia*)
- Bishop’s hat (*Epimedium* species)
- Candytuft (*Iberis sempervirens*)
- Christmas rose *Helleborus* species)
- Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* species)
- Geum (*Geum* species)
- Japanese spurge (*Pachysandra terminalis*)
- Lamb’s ear (*Stachys byzantina*)
- Lilyturf (*Liriope* species )
- Marjoram (*Origanum majorana*)
- Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)

- Phlox (*Phlox* species)
- Sedge (*Carex* species)
- Sedum (*Sedum* species)
- St. Johns wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
- Sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)

## Perennials

Many of these have showy flowers, though some are more subtle.

- Bee balm, Bergamot (*Monarda* species)
- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* species)
- Bluebeard (*Caryopteris* species)
- Calla lily (*Zantedeschia* species)
- Cape fuchsia (*Phygelius capensis*)
- Catmint, Catnip (*Nepeta* species)
- Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)
- Columbine (*Aquilegia* species)
- Coneflower (*Echinacea rubra*)
- Crocosmia (*Crocosmia* species)
- Daylily (*Hemerocallis* species)
- Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*)
- Grape hyacinth (*Muscari* species)
- Hardy fuchsias (*Fuchsia* species)
- Hardy geranium (*Geranium* species)
- Iris (*Iris* species)
- Japanese anemone (*Anemone japonica*)
- Lady’s mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*)
- Mission bells (*Fritillaria* species)
- Peony (*Paeonia* species)
- Russian sage (*Perovskia* species)
- Sedum (*Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’)
- Shasta daisy (*Chrysanthemum maximum*)
- Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*)
- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

## Annuals

These must be replanted yearly, but their variety is worth the effort.

- Borage (*Borago officinalis*)
- Love in a mist (*Nigella damascena*)
- Pot marigold (*Calendula* species)

## Shrubs

Shrubs add structure to your garden, especially in winter, and are very important as shade and protection from aerial predators.

- Barberry (*Berberis* species)
- Euonymus (*Euonymus* species)
- Forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*)
- Hebes (*Hebe* species)
- Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* species)
- Lavendar (*Lavendula* species)
- Lilac (*Syringa* species)
- Mahonia (*Mahonia* species)
- Rose (*Rosa* species)
- Sage (*Salvia* species)
- Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)
- Spiraea (*Spiraea* species)
- Viburnum (*Viburnum* species)
- Weigela (*Weigela* species)

## Trees

Any classic fruit tree suited to Zone 4 to 5 is a great choice, as are evergreens, aspens, nut trees and shade trees. One option often overlooked is mulberries (*Morus* species). They produce fruit similar to blackberries from self-fertile trees, meaning they only require one tree to produce fruit, unlike many other fruit trees. Birds greedily clean up any fallen berries.



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# Planting a Chicken Friendly Garden

