Congratulations on your decision to keep a small backyard flock of chickens. Fresh, nutritious eggs, fertilizer for the garden and lots of enjoyment for the entire family are only a few of the reasons for making a backyard flock part of your home environment. Along with the satisfaction your chickens will provide, you will soon realize there is a measure of responsibility attached to successful flock management. This guide has been developed by the Mobile Bay Area Backyard Chicken Club, a local 501-c3 organization dedicated to promoting responsible flock management, to help you maximize the enjoyment of your flock.

The Mobile Bay Area Backyard Chicken Club is a family oriented, educationally motivated club that understands the need for guidelines to raising healthy, happy chickens. We hope that you enjoy this knowledge-based brochure covering our best practice guidelines.

Our Guide will help you comply with the regulations for keeping poultry in the City of Mobile. All chicken keepers within the City must have a Residential Chicken Permit required by the City of Mobile Animal Shelter.

Please join us on Facebook at “Mobile Bay Area Backyard Chicken Club” to enjoy the educational benefits our Facebook group offers. In addition, we encourage everyone to become Club Members. Dues are only $20 a year and include monthly meetings, door prizes, spring and fall picnics, Christmas party and other benefits. Your yearly membership includes everyone in your family (at home). Please join us and find out how you can become a club member and participate in our activities.

MBABYCC, Board of Directors 2015

Cover picture: In memory of Eric Viering and his 5 Dominiques
Definitions and Details

1) **Coop:**
A chicken coop is a building or structure where chickens are kept at night. A coop may contain the nest boxes (where the chickens lay their eggs). Construction may be from most common building materials. If there is no constructed floor, some type of material (e.g., dirt, sand, hay or pine shavings) must be used to elevate the surface to prevent standing water and muddy conditions.

   a) A minimum of 3 square feet of coop floor space is recommended per chicken.
   b) The coop must be weather resistant from typical rains, snow, cold and wind.
   c) The coop must be ventilated to allow adequate fresh air in and out.
   d) In the winter, there should be no drafts over or around the chickens.
   e) Door(s) or access panels must be provided to allow cleaning and maintenance.
   f) The roost pole(s) (where the chickens sleep) must be elevated above the floor level and should provide at least 8 to 14 inches of continuous horizontal space, depending on breed size.
   g) If multiple poles are used in a vertical placement, there should be a minimum of 12 inches vertical separation and 8 inches horizontal offset from the next pole.
   h) The poles should have a rounded top and should be a minimum of 1.5 inches in diameter for standard breed chickens.
   i) No type of heating device should be used in the coop.
   j) Cedar shavings should not be used because it causes respiratory issues with chickens.
   k) Coops must be kept clean and free from unpleasant odors.
2) **Nest Box:**
The nest box (egg box) is a semi-enclosed container where the chickens will lay their eggs. Construction may be from most common building materials including premade containers. They can be located inside the chicken coop or external to the coop, provided they are weather protected.
a) A minimum base dimension of 12” x 12” is recommended for standard breeds (larger breeds may require a larger size).

b) Dividing walls should be about 6” high to give a little privacy.

c) The number of recommended nest boxes depends on the number of hens. A minimum of 1 nest box is recommended for each 4 to 5 hens.

d) Hay, straw, pine shavings or a soft synthetic or natural material can be used to line the bottom and provide a soft nesting area.

e) Cedar shavings should not be used because it causes respiratory issues with chickens.

3) **Pen/Run:**

The pen/run is an enclosed area where chickens reside during daylight hours. It must have adequate and protected feed and water systems/containers. The pen/run is typically connected to the chicken coop to allow easy access for the chickens. The wall and roof area are typically enclosed with a wire mesh. The floor/ground can be natural grass, dirt, sand or other natural materials.

a) No pen/run should have less than 30 square feet of floor/ground space.

b) A minimum of 10 square feet of ground/floor space is required per chicken.
c) The minimal height of the pen/run should be 24 inches.

d) The ground/floor must drain water quickly to prevent a muddy or wet ground/floor area.

e) The side walls should have a wire mesh no larger than 1”x1” up to about 24 inches high; the remaining walls and roof wire mesh should be no larger than 3” x 4”.

f) Door(s) or access panels must be provided to allow internal cleaning and maintenance.

g) A shade cloth or covering on the roof should be used to provide a shaded area and rain protection.

h) Water and food must be available at all times during daylight hours.

i) A “Chicken Tractor” (coop and pen/run built together with two or more wheels to allow portability and ease of movement from one grassy area to another) may be used as long as it meets the requirements of both the chicken coop and the pen/run.

j) Cedar shavings should not be used because it causes respiratory issues with chickens.

k) Pens/Runs must be kept clean and free from unpleasant odors.
4) **Coop/Pen/Run Placement:**
Within the City of Mobile there are many different size lots and yards. A setback placement of the coop/pen/run from the property line is not always practical. Since some garden or patio homes have very limited backyards (e.g., an 8’ X 45’ backyard) it would be nearly impossible to have a setback from the property line itself. Our recommendation is for a setback distance from the nearest neighboring house or dwelling.

   a) All coops/pens/runs must be placed a minimum of 15’ from the nearest neighboring house or dwelling. When practical (as lot size allows) increasing this distance is preferred.

   b) The ground elevation (natural or manmade) should be adequate to allow quick draining and designed in such a way to prevent any rainwater runoff issues that would violate any City or neighborhood codes, rules or ordinances.

5) **Free Range:**
Chickens that are not confined to a pen/run and are allowed access to a large open outside area (e.g. the backyard) during daylight hours, unsupervised, shall be considered free range chickens.

   a) All free range chickens must be contained by a wire fence, wood fence or other structure to prevent them from exiting the owner’s property; no overhead structure is required.

   b) If chickens free range daily, then no pen/run is required. However, shade and a covered area for rain protection must be available.

   c) A coop and nest boxes must still be available (as defined above), with open access, for all free range chickens.

   d) Adequate and protected feed and water systems/containers should be available at all times.
6) **Number of Chickens Allowed:**
Chickens are a flock animal and do not do well by themselves; thus requiring a minimum number. Due to environmental, health and safety concerns, there is also a maximum number established for your lot/coop/pen/run size.

   a) A minimum of 3 chickens is recommended.
   b) Maximum limits are determined by allowing adequate space in the coop and pen/run areas. Each chicken should have 3 square feet of space in the coop. If they are confined to a pen/run area for the majority of daylight hours, then they must also have 10 square feet of ground space for each chicken in the pen/run area.
   c) **Roosters: Effective 12/28/15**, roosters were banned within the City Limits of Mobile, AL.

7) **Feed and Water:**
All chickens require a quality food and ample fresh water at all times during daylight hours. There are many packaged chicken feed products available; they typically range from Starter (for baby chicks), Grower (for older chicks that have not reached maturity) and Layer (for chickens that are of egg laying age). Always consult package information to ensure you are feeding your chickens the age appropriate feed.

   a) Feed must be stored in a protected, dry environment.
   b) Feed should be stored in a tightly closed container so as not to attract predators and rodents.
   c) Chicken treats, scratch, cracked corn, etc... should be limited to less than 10% of their total daily food intake.
   d) Clean, fresh feed must be available, in an appropriate feeder, during all daylight hours; even if they are allowed to free-range.
8) **Predators:**
Chickens are easy prey for many predators (e.g., hawks, foxes, opossums, raccoons, rats, snakes, dogs, etc). Dogs are responsible for more local chicken kills than all others combined. All coops and pens/runs should be constructed in such a manner to provide reasonable protection against predators. Due to the nature of Free Range Chickens (as defined above), they are more vulnerable to attack.

   a) Free range chickens should have one or more natural or manmade safety/escape areas available (e.g., trees, bushes, parked vehicles, trailers, picnic tables, outbuildings, pen/run).
   
   b) Spilled or wasted feed must be removed and area around feeders kept clean.
   
   c) Coops and pens/runs must be kept clean and free from unpleasant odors.

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**MBABYCC Predator Poll**
*Taken March, 2015*

**Effective Period, 2014**

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General Information

How much waste will poultry create?
A typical laying hen weighing four pounds will produce between three to four ounces of waste per day. This is approximately 75 pounds per year. At the time of excretion, poultry waste is rather wet so it is important to have plenty of bedding/litter to absorb the moisture. The total amount of bedding, such as sand, wood shavings or straw (not pine-straw), can vary based on the size of the chicken coop/pen/run and number of birds. Plan for two to three inches deep of bedding. Bedding not only is important for keeping the poultry warm and dry, it also provides scratch which is important for poultry wellbeing. The bedding should be replaced when it stays too damp and/or cakes together. Good ventilation is an important way to help the bedding dry.

How should poultry litter be disposed of?
The two most likely disposal techniques will be in a composting system or applied to the soil such as in a garden (after it has broken down).

Dehydration and your Chicken

Prevention First:
You can start by taking a few simple steps to prevent dehydration.

-ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS provide fresh clean water! This is the most important job you have when it comes to your poultry! If you find that in hot weather you need to refill the waterer several times a day, and don't have the time to do it, purchase a waterer that holds more water or add an additional waterer! You'll save yourself a lot of grief!

How to Recognize Dehydration:
Before dehydration sets in, birds may pant, open their wings, and fluff out their feathers. These are the first warning signs. If you gently pinch the back of the shank (lower leg) the skin will not spring back as usual, much like the test performed on dehydrated humans.

The first symptom that tends to turn up is paleness of the face (waddles, comb, etc). Bear in mind that paleness does not always indicate dehydration; it might mean your birds are ill. You can distinguish this from illness or dehydration through further examination of symptoms.

A dehydrated chicken may exhibit any or all of the following symptoms, which may result in death:
• panting or labored breathing
• pale comb and/or wattles
• spreading wings away from body
• diarrhea
• lethargy
• limpness
• unresponsive
• seizures & convulsions

The Cure:
Place the bird in a cool, preferably dark place (to keep it calm) such as the basement. Provide water with electrolytes to rehydrate. Dip the bird's beak into the water a couple of times and, if need be, help it tilt its head back to swallow. Wait 5-10 minutes then repeat for the next hour or so. Increase time between waterings. Once the bird drinks on its own you can put out feed moistened with water. Leave the chicken in a cool environment with plenty of water and feed for about 24 hours to ensure survival.

Electrolytes:
(Electrolytes are essentially salts that can carry an electrical charge. The cells in your body rely on electrolytes to control cell membrane stability and to carry the electrical charges needed for muscle contractions caused by nerve impulses. Without electrolytes, the cells in your body couldn't communicate with each other or perform these essential functions).

• Electrolyte or electrolyte/vitamin packets specifically for poultry,
• The addition of sugar or molasses to the drinking water at the rate of about two teaspoons per cup (or more or less depending on need),
• In a pinch, Gatorade works too but the other ingredients (artificial coloring, flavoring, sweeteners, etc.) are not so good for chickens.

Heat Stress and dehydration deplete the body of electrolytes required for a chicken’s normal body functioning, therefore replenishing them is a priority when chickens suffer from heat stress and/or dehydration. The following is a recipe for making a homemade electrolyte solution.

HOMEMADE ELECTROLYTE SOLUTION
• 1/2 teaspoon salt substitute
• 1 teaspoon baking soda
• 1 teaspoon table salt
• 1 tablespoon sugar
• 1 gallon water

Administer this solution to dehydrated chickens in place of drinking water for four to six hours per day for a week, offering fresh water for the remainder of each day. ADVISORY: This solution should not be given to healthy chickens who are not suffering from heat stress or dehydration.
15 Fun Facts about chickens:

1) The chicken, *Gallus gallus domesticus*, is a domestic subspecies of the red junglefowl, a member of the pheasant family that is native to Asia. Genetic studies have found that the grey junglefowl also contributed to the chicken’s evolution.

2) Chickens aren’t completely flightless—they can get airborne enough to make it over a fence or into a tree.

3) Baby chickens are chicks. Female chickens are pullets until they’re old enough to lay eggs and become hens. Male chickens are called roosters, cocks or cockerels.

4) Roosters perform a little dance called ‘tidbitting’ in which they make sounds (food calls) and move their head up and down, picking up and dropping a bit of food. Researchers have found that females prefer males that often perform tidbitting and have larger, brighter combs on top of their heads.

5) The chicken was the first bird to have its genome sequenced, in 2004.

6) Chickens are omnivores. They’ll eat seeds and insects but also larger prey like small mice and lizards.

7) A rooster announces to a flock of chickens that he’s found food with a “took, took, took.” But the hens don’t pay attention if they already know that there is food around.

8) Scientists think that the rooster’s wattle—the dangly bit beneath his beak—helps him to gain a hen’s attention when he is tidbitting.

9) Hens can live 20 years but the average is 5-10.

10) It takes 24-26 hours to produce and lay one egg.

11) It will take 21 days for a chicken to fully develop inside the egg.

12) A hen can take the roll of a rooster, stop laying eggs, and begin to crow if needed.

13) It takes more than 4lb of feed to make 1 dozen eggs.

14) Different breeds of chickens lay different colored eggs: white, brown, green, and pink.

15) Eggshells (unwashed) have a natural outer coat called the “bloom” to keep bacteria out.