Exits and entrances

The doorways need to be large enough so that several chickens can enter and exit at once otherwise the dominant hens will block the more subordinate hens from moving in and out.

Vermin Proof

Contact with wild birds should be minimised as they will eat the food and can carry diseases such as paramyxovirus and avian influenza. Predators such as dogs and foxes can be kept out with sturdy wire that extends 3 feet along the ground at the bottom (no need to hide it under the earth as it will prevent digging if on the surface). An overhang of wire at the top stops jumping over the wire. Rats and mice should be discouraged with vermin proof feeders such as spiral feeders or treadle feeders and by collecting eggs soon after lay. Refer to current avian influenza guidelines for latest advice on compulsory housing: www.gov.uk/quidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu-cases-and-disease-Chit+06zgn@:0000009a12d0 612 79.46c

Perches and nest boxes

Should be low enough to the ground to prevent bruising of the feet when they jump off and there should be sufficient perch space to prevent competition. Allow around 25cm per bird (less if bantams). A nest box per 3 birds is acceptable.

Dust baths

Should be available to encourage preening and feather quality. The use of diatomaceous earth (DM) added to the dust bath will help prevent mites and lice from infesting the birds.

Geaning

The surfaces of the coop should be easily cleaned to reduce parasite burdens and disease risk. For small flocks, plastic moulded coops are an attractive, easily cleaned option with considerably less risk of red poultry mite which can be difficult to control in wood constructions.

Feeding

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Grit. Because birds do not have teeth the grinding of their food takes place in their muscular stomach (gizzard). Birds will ingest small stones for this purpose, but it is beneficial to provide them with a mixture of digestible and indigestible grit to help this process. The indigestible grit aids grinding of food and the digestible grit is a very important source of calcium for laying hens. Grit should always be provided in a separate bowl and chickens will moderate their own intake.

Kitchen scraps. Chickens are classed as production animals, and it is therefore against the law to feed kitchen scraps. Vegetables and fruit can be offered for enrichment but must be fed directly from the allotment or shop, not allowed to pass through a kitchen. Note that feeding dried mealworms is also not permitted.