

Poultry Toolkit

This is a basic description of what you need to do and consider in order to look after poultry. It is not meant to be definitive guide but to give you basic information and the confidence to give it a go. We really hope that you find it useful!

We have always found that people are willing to share their knowledge and experience. Therefore we advise that you search out local people who keep poultry and see how they manage their birds. At Loxley Valley Community Farm we always start with the principle that animals have three basic needs, food, water and shelter. Therefore ensure that whatever type of poultry you intend to keep that they always have access to these.

We strongly encourage you to allow all your poultry to be free range. At Loxley Valley Community Farm we do not use barn or cage systems for any of our birds.

Fencing

Fencing serves a number of purposes for poultry. It keeps them contained, it keeps them away from areas where you don't want them to be ie vegetable areas, and it acts as a deterrent to predators.

At LVCF our preference is to use electricified poultry netting. Although this is more costly than some alternatives it has the following advantages. It is easy to move and therefore allows us to rotate the pasture our poultry is on, if one of the more powerful energisers is used it is a highly effective deterrent to predators.

Regulations

By law* you must register if you own or are responsible for a poultry premises with 50 or more birds. This requirement also applies even if the premises is only stocked with 50 or more birds for part of the year. You can register the the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk

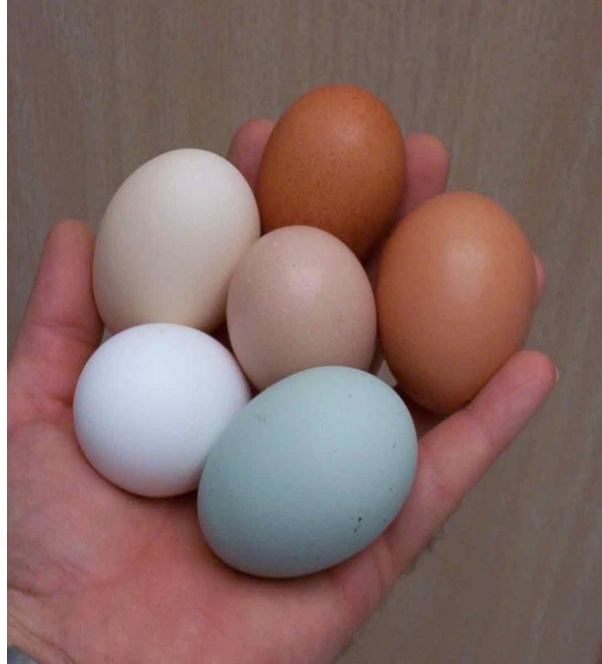
*This is the case at the time of writing and we would urge all people/organisations to check the relevant legislation

Egg Laying Chickens

Chickens do not require a cockerel in order to lay eggs. Not having a cockerel means that you are less likely to cause upset to your neighbours, by them being woken in the early hours of the morning by the cockerel crowing.

Our chickens are allowed to eat as much as they want. They are allowed out on to pasture during the day to forage for insects and to eat grass; yes interestingly chickens do eat grass and this helps give the yolks of free range eggs a natural dark yellow colour.

There are many different breeds of chickens to choose from. However some breeds are more prolific layers and some are better suited to free range systems. At the moment LVCF have a variety of different breeds. This allows us to have mixed colours of eggs ranging from blue to dark brown.



The different coloured eggs taste exactly the same but we think it provides additional interest especially for the children.

Our setup is as that we have a poultry house with a connected fully enclosed pen. The house and pen are inside a larger fenced area. This allows us in an evening to gather the hens into the enclosed pen where we know they are safe from predators. Inside the pen is their drinker and feeder. The hens can then take themselves to roost when they wish.

Our routine is:-

Morning:

Open the door of the enclosed pen to give hens access to the fenced pasture.
Observe hens for any unusual behaviour
Fill drinker with clean water
Collect any eggs that have been layed

Evening:

Fill drinker with clean water
Fill poultry feeder

Collect any eggs that have been layed
Put hens into their enclosed pen and ensure it is secured

Our hens are fed on layers pellets but supplement their diet by eating insects, worms, slugs and vegetation they find in their free range area.

Ducks

At Loxley we love our ducks! The ducks we currently have are for egg production and pest control. Our larger Orpington ducks lay lovely large white eggs. We also have small Call ducks that are great around the veg patch as they love eating slugs.

Our ducks are allowed to free range around the farm. The only disadvantage to this is that we have to protect young or tender vegetable plants as the ducks will eat them. They do not bother with the older plants but will happily eat the slugs and snails.

In our opinion you cannot keep ducks without having water for them to bathe. At Loxley rather than having a duck pond we use a shallow, 30cm deep, long plastic trough. This is sunk into the ground to make access easier for the ducks. The advantage of this is that it easy for us to clean out when it gets dirty.

Our ducks have their own home with a connected fully enclosed pen. This allows us in an evening to gather the ducks into the enclosed pen where we know they are safe from predators. Inside the pen is their drinker and feeder. The ducks can then take themselves to roost when they wish.

Our routine is:-

Morning:

Open the door of the enclosed pen to give ducks access to pasture.
Observe ducks for any unusual behaviour
Fill drinker with clean water
Collect any eggs that have been layed

Evening:

Fill drinker with clean water
Fill poultry feeder
Collect any eggs that have been layed
Put ducks into their enclosed pen and ensure it is secured

Our ducks are fed on layers pellets but supplement their diet by eating insects, worms, slugs and vegetation they find around the farm.

Turkeys

At Loxley members had a long debate about whether to keep turkeys or not. Some members felt that they were a vital part of our “produce your own Christmas dinner” objective and others just weren’t bothered. In the end we decided to have some and I think all members are now turkey converts!

Certainly where we are its highly unusual to see turkeys free range in fields and the birds make an arresting and unusual sight.

When purchasing turkeys you really have 3 choices, buy adults and have your own breeding programme, buy turkey poults which will usually be about 5 weeks old or buy day old turkey chicks.

All poultry chicks are kept under heat for the first 4 or 5 weeks after being hatched. This is provided either by their mother or an electric or gas brooder. If you buy turkey poults at 4 or 5 weeks old then they will be off heat and are ready to go outside. The disadvantage of buying at this age is that they will be much more expensive than turkey chicks.

As we also intend to raise meat chickens which are difficult to buy as poults we decided to invest in a brooder so we could purchase day old chicks.

We decided to have Norfolk Bronze turkeys as we believe this slower growing variety provides superior meat and is more adapted to a free range environment. Our day old turkey chicks were the same size as chicken chicks, but were a lovely mottled brown and yellow. We kept them inside for around 4 weeks under a gas brooder, during this time we did have some chicks die but with birds of this age you must expect to lose some.

At 4 weeks of age the poults came off heat as they were fully feathered and were introduced to their outside home and their pasture. From this point the difference in the turkeys became visible as their growth rates increased and they thrived in the outdoor environment.

Our turkeys are extremely social birds. They seem especially to be attracted to children and will always get as close to any children on the farm as possible.

We provide our turkeys with as much food as they can eat both night and day. We use only a commercially available turkey feed. However because the turkeys are free range they do supplement this with insects and grass. In fact we are amazed on how well trimmed the turkeys keep the pasture.

Our turkey shed is kept within the confines of an electric fence. This keeps the turkeys confined and also acts as a deterrent to any predators

It is really important that you keep the turkeys and other poultry separated. Chickens and other poultry are host to a protozoan called blackhead. Most poultry has a resistance to this but the disease is fatal to turkeys.

Our routine is:-

Morning:

Open the door of the shed to give turkeys access to their pasture.

Observe turkeys for any unusual behaviour

Put Feeder and drinker in pasture area

Fill drinker with clean water

Fill poultry feeder

Evening:

Fill drinker with clean water

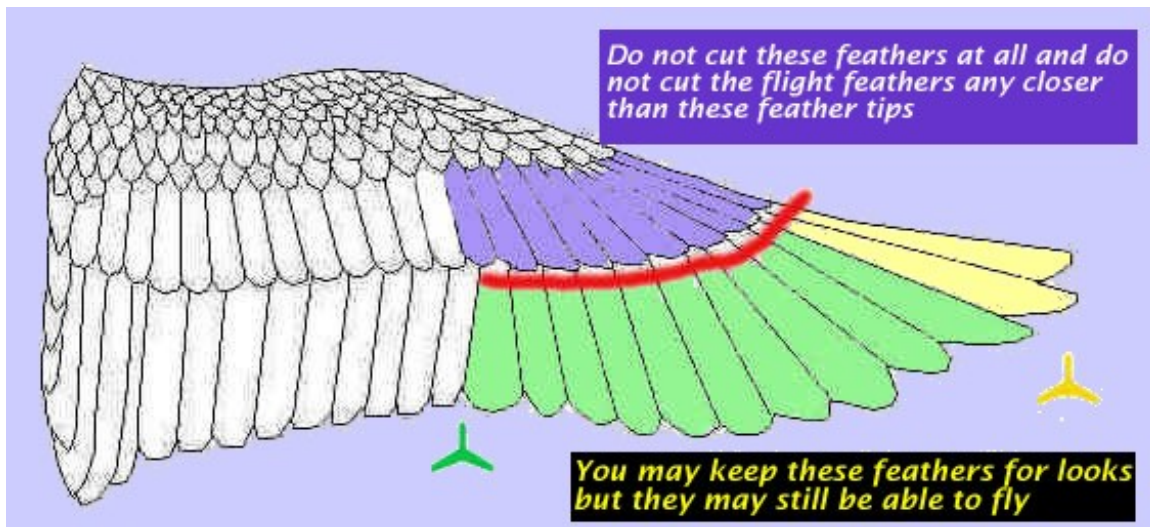
Fill poultry feeder

Put Feeder and drinker in turkey shed

Put turkeys in their shed,

Clipping Wings

We clip the wings of all of our poultry. The following illustration shows which feathers to cut and where to do them. You only need remove the feathers on one wing, this unbalances the bird and it is unable to fly.



At Loxley Valley Community Farm we always cut the feathers of the left hand wing. This makes it easier for us to check whether the wings are due to be trimmed again as we only have one to check.

Summary

We strongly encourage people to check www.defra.gov.uk for details of the legislation that may apply to the keeping of poultry.

We hope you've enjoyed this guide and feel inspired to have your own poultry. If you do you'll find a wide range help and information available to you.