

Hens take to the Hatch



By DEBRA BUTLER
Contributing Columnist

It was late in the afternoon on a cool January day when I stepped out the back door of a vacation rental house in Columbia, South Carolina.

Gazing out across the open acreage and toward the line of woods at the edge of the property, I noticed chickens, scurrying to and fro, scratching in the dirt for insects, with several other hens running towards a man casually scattering food on the ground for them to eat.

A stocky black Labrador stood close by, sniffing the ground and the chickens as they approached. The man turned out to be my Airbnb host, and what started out as simple curiosity about his chickens, turned into a winding road of research for a required class project, followed by my decision to start my own flock.

I was intrigued by the fact that John Beerman was raising his own backyard chickens for the purpose of having fresh eggs, as well as the pure enjoyment of tending to his hens.

Beerman looks forward to the end of each workday when he opens the coop to allow the chickens to free range until sundown, at which point they automatically head back to the safety of their coop where they roost for the night.

Beerman gives away many of the fresh pale blue and light brown eggs to his friends and neighbors while keeping just what his family needs for themselves.

According to Beerman, "You can leave the fresh eggs out on your counter for six months, as long as you don't wash off the bloom on the egg. As soon as the eggs are washed, they need to be refrigerated."

When you consider that chickens can live from 10 to 14 years, much thought should go into whether the added responsibility of caring for chickens is right for you.

Additionally, not all neighbors in close proximity are always that fond of a flock of poultry — especially if that flock includes a rooster.

After returning home, I contacted the Code Enforcement office of Taylor County to inquire about my own ability to have chickens, and I was told it would not be a problem.

According to Officer Joe Brenner, "The only complaint we ever get about chickens is if a rooster crows a lot, because they don't know when to stop. This is Taylor County, where a lot of people have penned up hunting dogs that bark all the time, but our biggest complaints are about the roosters."

The increase in people being stuck at home during the pandemic and a heightened concern of food shortages led to an increase in the interest of backyard chicken farming.

In an NPR article from April 2020, Kendall Fox of the Freedom Ranger Hatchery in Lancaster County, Pa, is quoted as saying, "People are at home, so they're looking for something for their

families to do while they're home. The other reason is the security of having food in their backyard."

In the same article, John Monaco, president of the American Poultry Association, states, "Backyard poultry has been on the upswing all over, especially in the rural areas, for the last five or 10 years. Raising your own chickens and even your own broilers — it's become a lot more fashionable to do it."

Ever since 1918, when then-Postmaster General A.S. Burleson authorized it, day-old chicks have been shipped through the United States Post Office.

That's right! Baby chicks can be sent through the mail.

Although many people buy their chicks from local breeders, ordering them online and having them shipped gives the buyer a larger selection of breeds to choose from and, in many cases, vaccination options.

Newborn chicks can survive 72 hours without food or water thanks to the nutrients from the egg yolk, which they ingest immediately before hatching.

Reputable hatcheries will replace chicks that do not survive the journey

or that die within the first 48 hours of arrival.

Several factors during the COVID-19 pandemic created delays within the postal service, causing many baby chicks to arrive already dead.

Numerous animal rights groups rallied together last year in an effort to end the shipment of baby chicks.

This did not go over well with the many hatcheries across the states who rely on the post office for keeping their businesses above water.

Not only do backyard chicken hobbyists rely on the post office for the shipment of chicks, but many large chicken farming operations do as well.

An exceptionally-cold winter last year, in addition to delays at the post office during the

pandemic, were reason to blame for the arrival of thousands of dead chicks.

Chick shipping season typically runs from February through October.

While doctors have noted a rise in salmonella cases since the pandemic, predominantly due to people not washing their hands after handling

their chickens, there are also environmental hazards to be cognizant of.

Chicken poop is certainly good for use as a garden fertilizer especially when combined in a

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Flood Relief

The Sowers of the Seed Food Pantry will remain open from Aug. 13-15 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to accept donations for the Steinhatchee community.

Those who were impacted by the flood and are in need of necessities, please contact the Sowers of the Seed Food Pantry at (850) 295-3787.

The Taylor County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) and the Perry First Assembly of God will be distributing drinking water and cleaning supplies today (Friday).

The distribution will take place at the TCSO Steinhatchee Substation from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. while supplies last.

(Photo by Debra Butler)

Taylor Coastal Water & Sewer District Meeting Time Change

The Taylor Coastal Water and Sewer District meetings will now be held at 6:00 P.M.

The District meets the fourth Tuesday each Month except for November and December when the meetings are held on the third Tuesday.

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