

FRESH EGGS: JUST OUT THE BACK DOOR

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Keeping chickens has become a popular hobby throughout the United States in recent years. People on farms and in rural areas have always kept chickens, but now the hobby has spread to urban areas as well. It has become trendy for urban professionals to keep a few chickens, and nearly every large city allows it.

Why have millions of people decided to raise chickens? The new push to keep backyard flocks is part of the emphasis on refitting ourselves as locavores—those who eat as much locally grown food as possible. In this age of genetically modified food, isn't it great to think that we can raise and grow food for our families? With that in mind, urbanites have carved out spaces in small yards for vegetable gardens and chicken coops.

There is nothing as delicious as a fresh egg collected and cooked in the morning. Eggs are the perfect protein food, and those from a home flock are the best. But there are other reasons for keeping chickens. They will eat your food leftovers—wilted lettuce, celery tops, etc., thus reducing the amount of food that goes to a landfill. If you are able to give them “free range” of your yard, they will munch weeds, grass, and insects.

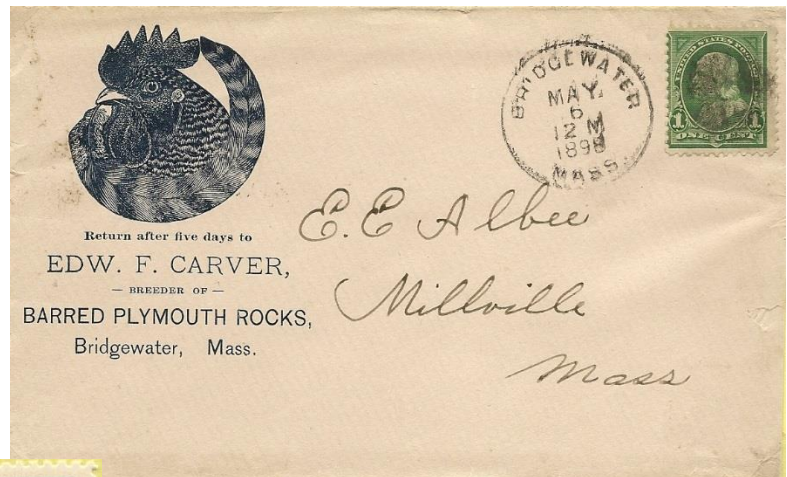
Children love chickens and learn the importance of routines and obligations when caring for them. Chicken keeping is easy. After the coop and run (open caged area for exercise) are in place, they need only food and water on a daily basis, and bedding replenished weekly. Today's breeds have few health problems.

Perhaps most of all, watching chickens is fun and relaxing. After a busy day at the computer screen, the simple act of tossing some feed and watching hens come running allows us to experience the joy in simple things.

Codes in most cities prohibit the keeping of roosters. There is no doubt that roosters, with their plumage, are magnificent creatures, but they can be aggressive and they are noisy. Hens get along fine on their own, so most people choose only hens.

Keeping chickens declined after World War II, as “modern” people embraced supermarket shopping. Breeds were developed for commercial poultry operations, and some traditional breeds were in danger of extinction. Fortunately, that is now being reversed, as hatcheries are selling breeds that have been around for centuries. Let us look at a few popular breeds.

The **Plymouth Rock** is an American original. The most popular breed in the world was developed in New England in the middle of the 19th Century. The Barred Plymouth Rock has distinctive black and white bars, or stripes. There are also white, black, buff, and silver Plymouth Rocks. In addition to their prolific laying, they are docile and friendly. They can tolerate all kinds of weather and have few health problems.



Barred Plymouth Rock
Advertising Cover



Plymouth Rock
Poster Stamp



Plymouth Rock
Romania Sc#1558

The **Orpington**, a big, hardy breed was developed in Orpington, Kent, United Kingdom. It is very popular in the U.K., France, and the U.S., as it provides large, brown eggs. The most popular is the Buff Orpington, which is prized for its beautiful gold color.



Rhode Island Red
US Sc#1991b



Rhode Island Red
Bophuthatswana Sc#284



Buff Orpington & Chicks
Montserrat Sc#764



Buff Orpington
Uruguay Sc#1911b

Known for its prolific egg-laying, the **Rhode Island Red**, is also popular because it is friendly, intelligent, and hardy in most climates. It is the state bird of Rhode Island.

Prospective urban chicken-keepers have myriad books, videos, and websites available for information on how to get started, choose breeds, and manage day-to-day. For those who would like a no-obligation trial, there is *Rent the Chicken*, a business that will rent a pair of hens, coop, and food from May to November for \$350.

RIDE 'EM

This is the Year of the Horse in the Chinese lunar year cycle. Get ready for a stampede of horse issues this year. Last year, the snakes were bad enough. But horses are way more popular subjects than snakes, so I expect to see equine stamps from almost every postal issuing authority and from others of doubtful authority as well.

These issues started to appear late last year. I have not attempted to count the quantity so far, but it is a significant number.

On 6 January 2014, Tonga issued a MS of four different designs depicting a thoroughbred horse to commemorate the lunar year. The designer was Alison Ditko. I was unable to find any printer or production information for this set.

It is interesting that most of the few horses in Tonga are draft animals used in farming.

