

Omlet Guide to Keeping Chickens

Your eglu and chickens have arrived! Please take a moment to read through this guide which is full of essential information, advice and tips on keeping your chickens happy and healthy. There are also recommendations on how to keep your eglu in tip-top condition, if you ever have a question that's not answered here please call us or go online.



So eggciting - the chickens are here!

Online Club

To meet up with other new and experienced chicken keepers you should visit the Omlet forum and gallery. Lots of people proudly put pictures of their chickens, gardens and first ever home produced eggs in the online gallery and the discussion areas of the forum can be funny, helpful and reassuring if you are new to chicken keeping. To access the forum simply go to www.omlet.co.uk/club

Getting Started

It is very important that you keep your chickens in the eglu and run for the first 5 days, so that they learn where their new home is. After this, when you let your chickens out in your garden, they will instinctively come home to roost in the evenings. If on the first night your chickens don't go into the eglu to roost you can put a torch inside the eglu, at dusk the chickens will be drawn to the light, and once inside the eglu you can close the door and remove the torch.

Now you're probably wondering – when am I going to get some eggs? Chickens will generally start to lay between the ages of 19 and 22 weeks old. Omlet tries to deliver chickens between the ages of 16 and 20 weeks so you shouldn't have to wait too long. In the summer the chickens will (because of the longer daylight hours) start laying at around 18-20 weeks old. In the shorter days of winter they will probably start when they are about 22 weeks old.

Moving house can unsettle the chickens a little and initially they may be quite wary of you. Spending only a small amount of time with them whenever you can will make a huge difference. Try feeding them a little sweetcorn or some grapes by hand and before you know it you'll be able to pick your chickens up whenever you want.

Daily Care

Open the eglu door

When you get up you can let the chickens out of the eglu by opening the front door. If you are at home you may want to let your chickens out of the run as well. But if no-one is going to be in and you have foxes which are about during the day it will be safer to leave the chickens in the run. Remember not to let your chickens out of the eglu and run for the first five days.



Let your chickens out in the morning

Check for eggs!

Regular collection will help prevent any damage to the eggs and discourage your chickens from getting broody - see also the section on broodiness.



Check for eggs before lunch

Food and Water

Make sure the eglu feeder is full of layers pellets and the eglu drinker is full of clean water. If it is extremely cold make sure that the water is not frozen preventing the chickens from drinking. In either extremely hot or extremely cold weather it is best to check the water twice a day to make sure the chickens don't go thirsty.



Make sure they have food and water

Position of the shade

The shade protects the chickens from wind, rain and sun so it may need relocating especially if you have moved the eglu to a new position.



Repositioning the shade

Close the door

As dusk falls your chickens will potter back into the eglu to roost. Closing the eglu door behind them will ensure a peaceful and secure night.

Food and Water

Food and Water

Your eglu comes with a feeder and a drinker. A fully grown chicken will eat about 120grams of layers pellets a day (about a small cup full). Chickens drink much more than you'd imagine so make sure that they always have plentiful fresh water. On hot days it is worth checking the water in the afternoon as well as the morning. If you aren't going to be able to check for a day or two hang an extra drinker in the run.

The feed supplied by Omlet is known as 'layers pellets.' It contains all the protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals required by your chickens. As this will keep your chickens in tip-top condition it is best to always have this available, don't worry about over-feeding, they will only eat as much as they need.

Grit is another important part of your chickens' diet. There are two types of grit in your layers pellets. Firstly, a soluble calcium grit which is used to create the egg shell. Secondly, there is a hard flint like grit which the gizzard (a muscular organ) uses to grind up the feed. There is no harm in giving your chickens an extra bowl of mixed grit which you can pick up from the Omlet shop. Your chickens will also pick up edible things from your garden an extra supply of grit will ensure that the egg shells are always hard and that the gizzard is able to work properly.

Chickens eat around 120grams of layers pellets a day, so a 20kg bag will last four chickens about 6 weeks. Layers pellets are readily available at country stores and some pet shops or you can order it from Omlet and have it delivered to your door!



A standard bag of organic feed

See www.omlet.co.uk/shop for all your chicken needs.

Treats for your chickens

Chickens can be easily persuaded to have treats so after their morning feed of layers pellets you could offer them something extra from the kitchen! They do have individual tastes but as a general rule they enjoy soft fruit and vegetables, left over pasta, rice and bread. As they don't have teeth they can't manage to eat things like potato peelings unless they have been cooked a bit to soften them. To keep things neat and tidy either place these titbits in the eglu feeder or try filling a net bag with a selection of things and hanging it in the run for them to peck at. Don't feed your chickens any form of meat or anything salty or sugary.



Raisins don't last long!

It's best to only give your chickens these extras in the afternoon. This way they won't fill up on food that is not as nutritious as the layers pellets. If they don't have a good diet, their egg production may well drop.

Weekly Care

As time goes by you will develop your own routine, but here are some things that we suggest you do during the week:

Droppings trays

Keep an eye on the level of droppings and empty it when it looks reasonably full. Depending on how many chickens you have this may be every 2 to 4 days. The droppings can be dug straight into the vegetable garden, but it is a little too strong to be used fresh in flower beds. Adding the droppings to your compost bin will speed up the process and produce an excellent compost.



Empty your chickens' droppings into the compost or vegetable patch

Moving the eglu

There is no hard and fast rule for how often you should move the eglu as this depends on how much time your chickens spend inside the run as opposed to out in the garden. Simply keep an eye on the grass and move the eglu when the grass becomes slightly worn. In general this could be once a week if your chickens are spending the majority of the time in the run. Your chickens will do droppings on the lawn, but these can be cleared by raking, brushing or simply with the lawn mower. Another good solution if you have limited grass is to site the eglu in a layer of wood chippings (see page 3.)



Move your eglu See your specific eglu instructions for how

Health

Try to check that your birds are healthy every week by picking them up and checking for all the signs of a healthy chicken as outlined in the 'Chicken Health' section on page 4.



Checking your chickens' health

Clean nest area

Refresh the nesting box by cleaning out the straw (or shredded paper), wiping clean and putting a fresh handful in. Don't use hay as this can go mouldy if it gets damp

Food Stocktake

Check that you have enough feed for the week ahead. If you end up buying a different brand of layers pellets it is best to mix it with some of the original feed so that your chickens don't suddenly notice a difference. If you do just switch feed your chickens may turn their beaks up at it!

Long Term Care

Every 2 - 4 weeks you should give your eglu more of a thorough clean. Remove the roosting bars, give it a good hose out, scrubbing any dirty parts and finally rinse with the hose. You can use a pet disinfectant (available in pet shops) but you should never use a strong household disinfectant like bleach or worktop cleaner on the eglu.

Leave everything to dry out in the sun as the UV rays will kill off bacteria and other things that like to lurk in the dark!

Keep Your Chickens On Wood Chips

If you want to keep your eglu in one place in the garden, keeping it on wood chippings is a great solution. Cleaning the run is as simple as raking out and replacing the soiled chippings every month or so. Making a chipped area for your eglu doesn't take long and is quite cheap too. The following is what you need for an eglu or and eglu cube with the standard 2m run:

- A 4 metre (12ft) by 1.8 metre (6ft) area. This will give room for your eglu allowing access to the dropping trays.

- 300 litres of wood chippings: available from any good garden centre. Choose a chunky type, you can also use bark but it tends to go a bit mulchy.

- 10m or 30ft of edging (this is enough to make a 3 sided area like the one in the pictures.)

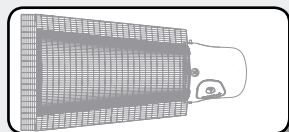
Instructions:

- Put your eglu in your chosen location.
- Lay the edging out around the eglu. Make sure you leave enough room to open the run door and the droppings tray.
- Move the eglu away and fix the edging in place.
- Put your eglu and run back in place inside the edging.
- Pour the wood chippings into the edged area and within the run. Now rake it out ensuring all the ground is covered to a depth of around 5-10cm.

Now you can stand back and let your chickens give you a well deserved pat on the back!



Chunky bark chippings and some edging



4m by 1.8m area



Lay the edging out



An eglu filled and surrounded by chippings

Handling

How easy it is for you to pick up your chickens will depend on how used to human contact they are. A little enticement with a handful of grapes or a juicy red tomato should get them close enough! The best way to catch a chicken is to quickly bring both hands from above to press both wings against their bodies. This stops them flapping which makes it a lot easier to hold on to them. Then lift them up with one hand supporting them underneath and one on top.



Picking your chicken up



One hand supporting the body, the other preventing the wings flapping

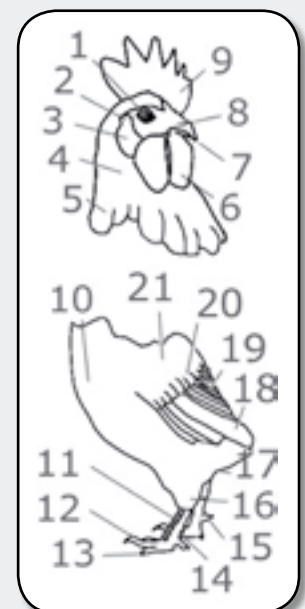
Holding them in this way makes them feel supported and comfortable and in the winter will keep your hands nice and warm! It's also the best way to hold them when you are doing a health check. Handling your chickens and getting them used to human contact will help you in the long run even if you aren't keen to pick them up purely for a stroke. You may want to put them in the eglu in a hurry before leaving the house, and a willing chicken will make life much easier!

Sometimes your chicken may think that you are a cockerel and flatten itself to the ground in anticipation of mating. This will actually make it easier to pick up! Do NOT chase your chickens around grabbing at their tails or wings. This will only cause them panic which could be bad for their health or at the very least affect egg production.

Anatomy

Match the number on the diagram to its name in the list below. You can find out more about the individual parts in the glossary.

- 1 Eye
- 2 Ear
- 3 Ear lobe
- 4 Neck
- 5 Cape
- 6 Wattles
- 7 Beak
- 8 Nostril
- 9 Comb
- 10 Breast
- 11 Scales
- 12 Toe
- 13 Toenail
- 14 Shank
- 15 Spur
- 16 Hock
- 17 Vent
- 18 Primary flight feathers
- 19 Secondary flight feathers
- 20 Wing coverts
- 21 Wing Bow



Chicken Health

Omlet's chickens are fully vaccinated and do not require top ups. It is unlikely they will ever experience any serious illness. As a general rule, keep the eglu clean, ensure a clean, fresh supply of water at all times and a proper balanced diet and you should have no problems.

As your chickens are enjoying a natural outdoor life, exposed to wildlife and the elements they can have off days. When it is very hot your chickens will naturally seek out shade and may go off lay for a couple of days. Very stormy or changeable weather can have a similar effect on egg production.

Worming

Just like cats and dogs, it is a good idea to worm your chickens once a year usually in the spring. This is because they can pick up types of worms from the ground which can live in their intestines. If your chickens have stopped laying but are eating lots and have a spot of diarrhoea then they may need worming. Another sign is a pink rather than red comb. You can buy Verm-X, a 100% natural wormer from the Omlet shop.

Lice and red mites

By keeping the eglu clean you will almost certainly avoid any problems as they like to live in dark, dirty conditions. Lice will be visible as little light brown insects normally on the skin around the vent. Their eggs are laid on the shafts of the feathers and look like a white crust. If the eglu is kept clean and the chickens are dust bathing regularly, they are unlikely to get lice but if they do a simple dusting of lice powder around the infected area will get rid of them. Red mites live in crevices only coming out at night. As there aren't any crevices in the eglu it is extremely unlikely you will ever see them but if you do a thorough clean of the house using a pet safe disinfectant it will effectively get rid of them.

Easy Health Checks

Comb When fully grown the chicken should sport a nice firm comb. The comb will be bright red when the chicken is in lay.

Eyes should be beady and bright.

Beak should be clean with no discharge from the nostrils.

Active A healthy chicken will be perky, lean and active.

Legs and feet should be smooth and the scales should not be lifting. The colour of the legs is a good indicator of whether the chicken is laying. If they are very yellow then she is probably not laying eggs yet.

Body When you pick your chicken up her body should be plump and firm, but with no flabbiness.

Vent The vent (the chickens all purpose exit point) located under the tail feathers should be moist and white, with no lumps, crustiness, bleeding, etc. See the image on the right.



Checking your chickens vent for cleanliness

Droppings should normally be solid and have a white cap which is the urine as chickens do not do this separately. Over feeding on greens can result in some diarrhoea but if the droppings are consistently different then there may be something wrong.

It is unlikely that they will have any serious problems as long as you have been following the suggested day to day and week to week routines. If you feel that your hens need more attention then don't hesitate to call Omlet or email barbara@omlet.co.uk our chicken health expert. If it is an emergency you should call your local vet. A good tip if you live in a town is to register your chickens with the vet as an exotic pet as this will mean they are treated more economically than if they are classified as a farm animal.

Seasonal Chicken Care

When its hot...

If the chickens are in the run, make sure that the shade is positioned to give your birds a good area of shade. In hot weather chickens drink much more so keep an extra eye on the water container.

When its cold...

If your chickens have large combs, it is a good idea to rub them (the combs!) with vaseline to prevent frostbite. If the drinker is freezing over in the colder months then bring it indoors at night and check it again in the afternoon, (do not add salt, your chickens will not appreciate this!)

Fireworks night...

remember to make sure your chickens are well out of the way. All the bangs and flashes can upset your chickens, so tuck them up in the eglu out of harms way otherwise you may not have an egg for breakfast!

Wing Clipping

Although a fully grown chicken can't really fly (you don't often see a flock of chickens flying overhead!) they can do some quite high jumps. So to prevent your chickens from taking off, you can clip a wing. This sounds painful, but is infact just like a haircut. It involves trimming the primary feathers on one wing, to unbalance them making take off very lopsided! Clipping only the primary flight feathers is painless and should be done as in the photograph. A good guide is to cut the first 6-7 feathers back as far as the tips of the next line of feathers. To see how far back you can trim the feathers without hurting the chicken, hold the feathers up to the light and you'll see where the bloodvessels start in the shafts of the feathers. If however you are unsure, please consult your vet.



Fanned wing showing the primary flight feathers



Fanned wing after clipping

Chickens moult once a year, this lasts about 6 weeks and they lose a lot of feathers starting from the back of the neck and then further back across their bodies until they look quite scruffy. Don't worry, the feathers grow back more splendid and beautiful than before! If you have clipped your chickens wing you will need to do this again now.

Broodiness

When spring starts to twitch the leaves from the deciduous trees your chicken may feel the urge to sit on the nesting box, puff herself up and refuse to budge. She has gone broody, its nothing to worry about but you may want to try and get her to give up as none of her eggs would ever hatch. Another reason to encourage her to resume normal duties is that while she is broody she won't lay any eggs! The first thing to do is to collect any eggs under her, secondly lift her off the nest and restrict access to the nesting box by putting something in it like a ball or flowerpot. If you do this straight away the chicken will usually give up within a couple of days. If they are being really persistent though you may find that the only solution is to dunk the hen in a bucket of cold water! This works because while a chicken is broody they raise their body temperature slightly, the cold water brings their temperature down.

It's worth noting that "broodiness" is a maternal instinct which varies from chicken to chicken and can happen at any time. If you are not removing the eggs everyday there is more chance that a chicken will go broody. If you do nothing then your chicken will stay like this for up to 4 weeks (the incubation time for eggs is 21 days but if nothing happens they sometimes carry on a while longer.)

Eggs

The first time a chicken lays an egg is a momentous day! Don't be surprised if it is a little on the small side though. It usually takes a few weeks for the egg size to increase to something more filling. The egg laying can also be a bit erratic to begin with but within a couple of weeks the hen should settle into a good rhythm producing an egg most days.

Yolk colours

Why are some yolks yellower than others? For a deep yellow yolk you should make sure your birds are eating their greens. Broccoli, spinach, grass and brussel sprouts work (be warned sprouts can have the same gaseous effect on chickens as for humans!)



Yolks the colour of the rising sun



If it floats its rotten

You can try feeding different things to vary the yolk colour. For instance if they eat some green acorns the egg yolks will take on a greenish tinge. Paprika on the other hand will make the yolks redder.

Freshness

There is no better or fresher egg than the one you collect yourself from your own chickens. If you are letting your chickens out in your garden you may sometimes find one they've secretly laid in the garden and want to check its freshness. Without cracking it, you can do a simple test by putting the egg in a bowl of water. If it sinks, its fresh. If it stands upright, its a few days old. If it floats, its rotten. Simple!

Storage

You should store the eggs in a cool place with the broad end up so that the air sac inside the egg is at the top. It is not necessary to keep them in the fridge except in very hot weather. Stored like this they should keep for at least three weeks (if you can resist using them for that long). If in any doubt just do the test described above.

Strange Eggs

Eggs aren't always egg shaped. Your chicken may lay a long thin egg or a short round egg but apart from looking different, there is nothing wrong with them. These eggs are probably caused by shock to the chicken, for example a big thunderstorm, a loud aeroplane or fireworks night.

Blood Spot

This is an egg with a small amount of blood in it. They may look worrying but are still edible. The spots are caused by the breakage of a blood vessel in the ovary, possibly caused by a fright to the chicken. If you are squeamish just use this type of egg in a cake.

Tiny eggs

You may find a really small egg. This is caused by a foreign object taking the place of the yolk in the formation of an egg. These are known as a cockerels egg.

Weak shells

As mentioned in the feed section, weak shells are most probably caused by a calcium deficiency. To provide more calcium you could buy poultry grit from a petshop which has crushed sea shells in it or if you prefer a home-made solution, bake some old egg shells at 180degC for a few minutes to kill any bacteria and grind them up. Add the eggshell powder to your chickens feed and the shells should start to harden up.

Drop In Egg Production

Once your chickens have started laying they may not always produce eggs like clockwork, the reasons could be one of the following:

Moulting - When your chickens moult their egg production will drop and most likely stop until the new feathers are grown.

Fright - If your birds have had a fright this can result in no eggs for a while.

Worms - If you have had chickens for over a year they may need worming. (See 'Chicken Health')

Other Pets

Chickens tend to be braver than you think! Though it's usually better to allow your chickens to settle in for a day before introducing a lively dog. The majority of dogs will be happy with a new companion in the garden but it is still a good idea to introduce your dogs to your chickens on a lead. If you are at all unsure as to how your dog will behave with the chickens you should never leave them unsupervised together.



Chickens with their favourite feline friends. They get on well with dogs too

Cats will be interested in the chickens but as they are quite large compared with something like a pigeon they are extremely unlikely to chase them – infact if they do get too close they will probably get a good peck on the nose. Two or three chickens wandering around together can prove a formidable foe for sensitive noses!

Pecking Order

Every hen house has a pecking order which is established early on and then again if a new chicken is introduced to the flock. This ritual can be quite vicious but they will very quickly settle down. You shouldn't interfere unless one chicken is being denied food or water. If this is happening then put out an extra food and water supply away from the primary source.

Adding two or more hens to an existing flock is better than adding a single hen. If you are adding just one hen then it will probably be best to seperate the new hen from the existing flock so that they can see each other without being able to touch. An easy way to do this is to let your hens out then put the new hen in the eglu run. In the evening you should be able to mix the hens without too much trouble. Another tip is to try to introduce fully grown hens to an existing flock – they will be more likely to stand up for themselves.

If you let your chickens out in the garden then you could put your new chicken in the eglu so that the others can see her. In this way they should get used to her and she can get used to their new home in the eglu.

Washing Your Chicken

How to wash and dry your chicken: Usually chickens are only washed if being shown at an official show, but if your chickens get dirty and you feel they could do with a wash this is what to do.

The basic procedure is similar to washing somebody's hair in a sink except that you may want to wear a full set of waterproofs. Prepare a washing up bowl of luke warm water. Add some soap or washing up liquid or shampoo. It is important to hold the chicken firmly to prevent any escape attempts but without hurting it. Hold your chicken in the way outlined on page 3.

Now that you have your chicken where you want it you can start washing! Wash the feathers as if washing your hair but use an old toothbrush or something similar to take the dirt off its feet and legs.

You must now rinse your chicken with plenty of clean water. You will probably find that you need a couple of bowls of water to get rid of all of the soap. Unless you can get your chicken to obediently sit in front of a radiator, towels and a hairdryer are your best bet. Rub the feathers downwards with a towel to get the worst of the wetness out being careful not to damage them. If it's a hot summers day you can leave it at that but if its winter then to get rid of the last of the moisture, you can use a hairdryer on a low heat setting. Don't let the top feathers get too hot as they could get damaged.



A quick scrub with a toothbrush will make your chicken look fantastic

Curtains

Of course we all hope that our chickens will be there to greet us in the morning clucking happily in the garden, a fresh egg in the nest. But even chickens aren't immortal and if everything goes well will live on average for about four to five years. If your chicken is in pain we recommend that you take it to the vet. The vet may suggest an injection which will send your chicken gently off to a permanent sleep. It costs around £10 and is a service offered by all vets.

However your chicken has passed from this world into the next it is important that it is laid to rest in the appropriate way.

These days the only way to legally send your chicken off is to go to a vet for a cremation, this will cost around £7.

Transporting Your Chickens

If you ever need to carry your chickens around, maybe taking them to the vet or a friend's house while you are on holiday, you don't need any special equipment, just a cardboard box. For two chickens a box that measures roughly 40cm by 30cm by 30cm is fine.

Be sure that you cut some holes in the box to give the chickens some air. (Cut the holes into the box before you put the chickens in!) Now put some straw or wood shavings in the bottom for the chickens to sit in. They should be quite happy to be transported like this.



A roomy cardboard box with straw and good air holes

Foxes

Fantastic Mr Fox is a graduate of the school of deception and cunning but he has met his match in the eglu. Together, the eglu and run form an extremely secure area for your chickens. Features such as the anti-tunneling skirt, 3mm steel weld mesh run and recessed handles on the eglu make it as safe a chicken house as it is possible to buy. Here are some useful tips which make it less likely that a fox will get even so much as a sniff of your chickens.



Foxes are common in towns and the countryside

Foiling the attack

There are lots of things you can do to improve the safety of your chickens.

- Be conscientious about locking the chickens up at night, preferably before or latest at dusk.
- Don't leave any food lying around the garden.
- Make sure that the dustbin is always securely closed.
- Increase the height of your fence to at least six feet all the way round.
- If you have a dog their scent will often put a fox off from entering your garden
- If there is a male in the household, ask him to urinate around the garden this will act as a chemical repellent to the fox (honestly!)
- Tying up bags of human hair around the garden works in the same way.
- Ask your neighbours not to leave out food in their gardens
- At the time of writing councils tend not to take the problem of urban foxes particularly seriously, so why not also write to your local MP to raise the issue.
- If you have an extremely persistent offender then you can call in a pest control company (look them up in the Yellow Pages).

What else do foxes eat?

Foxes eat a wide range of things from mammals and birds to insects, worms and vegetables. There is an increasing problem with foxes in urban areas scavenging for food in dustbins. You should avoid leaving anything tempting lying around for the foxes, even fruit that has fallen from trees and spilt bird food will alert them to a potential feeding site.

Unfortunately foxes don't just kill for hunger's sake. Whole flocks of chickens have been destroyed by one fox, even though it probably only ate one of them. Tell-tale signs:

- 'Scraped' damage to your lawn. Foxes will scratch up grass to find tasty bug and beetle morsels.
- Droppings with lots of berries or pips in.
- 'Screaming' in the late evening and night. The sound of a fox can be unnerving as it sounds similar to a child screaming.



It is nice for your chickens to be out of the run as often as possible, but if you suspect any fox activity make sure that you only let them out when you are around. Very few foxes will approach if they sense human activity.

History

An ancient and noble bird, the chicken can trace its origins back to the dinosaurs (and probably the same warm pool of primeval water that humans emerged from if you go back far enough) but the bird that you and I would recognise probably appeared around 5000BC.

Early chickens roamed the foothills of the Himalayas and elsewhere in south and southwest Asia. Known as Gallus Gallus it had a strong beak and sharp claws and was quite capable of looking after itself. It wasn't until sometime between 3000 and 2000BC that Gallus Domesticus came onto the scene. In those days chickens were kept for religious sacrifice, cockfighting and as an early form of clock. The picture shows a prize fighter.



A fighting cock
'The Bone Crusher'

known as the Black Breasted Red Tailed Champion who killed three opponents in two minutes!

It didn't take long for the chicken to catch on in a big way and they started popping up all over the place. From America to Japan chickens were most definitely in fashion.

Many Greek Gods laid claim to the chicken. It was sacred to Athena goddess of wisdom and warfare, a symbol of fertility for Persephone, of love and desire for Eros and of commerce and productivity for Hermes. Because of its connection to the Gods the chicken was not eaten by the Greeks although they were partial to the eggs.

The Roman Empire

The Europeans started to breed chickens for meat and eggs. In Victorian times in the mid-nineteenth century breeding for show really took off. Queen Victoria herself became interested in chickens. The Victorians went chicken crazy, they organised clubs, competitions, exhibitions and paid hundreds of pounds at auction for the finest birds. Queen Victoria actually banned the sport of cockfighting in 1849.

The good news is that recently more and more people are starting to become interested in high quality food which has been produced in an ethical way. Buying organic or free range is good, but by keeping your own chickens you are even closer to the action!

**If you ever have any questions please don't hesitate to call us on 0845 450 2056
You can also email barbara@omlet.co.uk for advice.**

Glossary:

Abdomen: The underside of the birds body from keel to vent.

Bloodspot: An egg defect, caused by the rupture of blood vessels in the chicken. They are unsightly but still edible.

Bantam: Technically the 'Bantam' is a type of fowl that doesn't have a larger version. There are nine 'true' bantam breeds. Many small fowl are referred to as Bantams but are infact 'miniatures' or a small version of a large breed.

Broody: The desire to want to sit and hatch eggs.

Chalazae: The cords that anchor the yolk to the shell in the egg.

Chicken: Technically the term to describe a bird, (male or female,) of the current season's breeding.

Cock: A male bird after the first moult generally at about a year and a half old.

Cockerel: A male bird of the current years breeding.

Comb: The red muscle on the head of most chickens.

Crest: The bunch of feathers on the head of some breeds.

Crop: Part of the pre-digestive system of the chicken. Food collects here at the base of the neck and is softened before going through the rest of the digestive process.

Cushion: The area of the back in front of the tail on the female

Cuticle: The last coat put on the egg in the vagina acting as a barrier to disease.

Drinker: Container for water for birds to drink from.

Dust bath: Chickens will use an area of dry dust, be that earth or sand, to remove mites and lice form their feathers.

Ear lobe: The fleshy bit just under the ears.

Face: The skin around the eyes.

Flight feathers: The biggest primary feathers on the final half of the wing.

Gizzard: The internal organ of the chicken that collects grit and grinds food down.

Grit: Insoluble stoney matter fed to chickens to allow their gizzard to grind their food up.

Gullet: The oesophagus. (The pipe between the throat and crop.)

Hen: A female after her first laying period, roughly a year and a half old.

Hybrid: Birds that have been genetically bred from two different breeds for good characteristics from both, such as laying well and having a good amount of meat.

Keel: The birds breast bone.

Nicholls, Simon: One of the four founder members of Omlet. Small but perfectly formed and fluent in 'West country'.

Mash: A mixture of, (wet or dry,) coarse ground feed. **Meat spots:** Bits found inside an egg caused by some foreign body or other passing into the oviduct as the eggs is forming.

Moult: The yearly shedding and replacement of feathers. Lasts for around 8 weeks.

Paul, Johannes: One of the four founder members of Omlet. Also known as the Silver Fox.

Pea comb: A comb that looks like three separate combs, the middle one being the largest.

Pellet: Pellets formed from a fine mash bonded together.

Point of lay: A young pullet about 18 weeks old, the age at which the bird could start laying, though your first egg could be four weeks after this.

Primary feathers: The first ten feathers on the wing starting at the tip working towards the middle. Out of sight when the bird is resting.

Pullet: A female bird from the current year's breeding.

Pure breed: A breed that is pure, i.e. has had no crossing with other breeds or varieties within the same breed.

Rose comb: A wide flat comb nearly flat on top, covered with small nodules ending up with a spike. Size varies with breed.

Saddle: The area of the back in front of the tail on the male.

Scales: The horny tissue covering the toes and legs.

Shaft: The stem or base of the feather.

Single comb: A flat vertical comb with serrations along the edge.

Tuthill, James: One of the four founder members of Omlet. Has a beautiful singing voice.

Utility: Birds bred for meat or egg production rather than shows.

Variety: Birds of the same breed but of different colours.

Vent: The orifice at the rear end of the bird through which both eggs and faeces are ejected.

Wattles: The fleshy appendages hanging either side of the lower beak.

Windham, William: One of the four founder members of Omlet. Often mistaken for Barry Gibb from the BeeGees.

Wing clipping: The practice of clipping, cutting the end off, the primary and secondary feathers on one wing

The Omlet Guide to Buying Chickens

All eglus are fantastically well equipped: eggport, nesting box, roosting bars and dropping trays are all standard equipment but there is something missing - the chickens!

It's great to choose your own chickens and to make it easier we've put together a guide covering the different breeds available, what to look for in a healthy chicken and a comprehensive list of breeders across the country (available seperately.)

The chickens that we supply have been carefully chosen for a variety of reasons. Miss Pepperpot and the Gingernut Ranger are great egg layers as well as being hardy and docile. As a general rule hybrid hens (like Miss Pepperpot and the Gingernut Ranger) combine the qualities of two or more pure breed hens to create a better all round chicken. Hybrid hens are justifiably popular because they lay consistent numbers of delicious eggs, are very easy to look after and make excellent pets for children.

A lot of the suppliers listed in this guide also supply these chickens but you may find them under different names. Beside the pictures below we have given their pseudonyms as well as some other very similar suitable breeds.

Things To Look Out For In A Chicken

It is best to buy your chickens when it is light and the chickens are out and about. A healthy chicken will be bright, alert and active during the day. Her feathers will be glossy, and if she is already laying her comb will be pronounced and bright red. Younger birds, not yet laying eggs, have smaller combs which grow in size and colour. The legs should be smooth and if you pick her up she should feel firm not flabby.

You may see some hens with bald patches. This could be because they are in moult, an annual period where they loose quite a lot of feathers or because you are looking at the chicken at the bottom of the pecking order. If you buy a chicken like this, she will normally grow new feathers in a few weeks and look as good as new.

If you want to buy two or more different breeds of chicken, ask the supplier whether they will get on together. Make sure that the chickens are of a similar age and size to cut out the risk of a younger or smaller one being bullied unnecessarily.



Miss Pepperpot:
(Rhode Island Red/Maran cross)

Similar suitable hybrids:
Black Rock, Maran Cuivre, Bovans Nera



Gingernut Ranger:
(Rhode Island Red/Light Sussex cross)

Similar suitable hybrids:
Calder Ranger, Warren, ISA Brown

Know What You Want

It is important to go along to the chicken supplier with a good idea of what you want. The most important questions you should consider before buying are: do you require lots of eggs, are the chickens pets for children, how much space do you have in the garden and what will the neighbours think!?

Pure Breeds, Hybrids Or Bantams?

The egglu is suitable for medium size chickens, heavy breed chickens and bantams, refer to your specific egglu's instruction manual for how many of each they are suitable for.

Bantams are like bonsai versions of big chickens; they are delightful and well suited to smaller gardens and make good pets for children. The eggs they lay are about half the size of a full size egg and they also scratch less. Nearly all bantams are pure breeds and as such command a premium price.

Pure breed chickens are often flamboyantly feathered and as some are becoming quite rare, by buying them you are helping to preserve them – which is a good thing. However, pure breeds are on the whole unable to match the egg laying capabilities of the hybrid hens and are often not as docile.

Vaccinated?

Another advantage of hybrid chickens is that they have almost always been vaccinated against a range of common diseases making them very hardy and unlikely to get ill. Because it is very expensive to vaccinate chickens, not many small breeders do this and it is rare for pure breed hens to be vaccinated. Chickens from Omlet have been vaccinated against a long list of things. some of the most important (and difficult to pronounce) are:

- Marek Disease Virus
- Salmonella
- Coccidiosis
- Salmonella Enteritidis
- Infectious Bursal Disease
- Gumborough Disease
- Infectious Bronchitis
- Newcastle Disease
- Infectious Laryngotracheitis
- Avian Encephalomyelitis
- Egg Drop Syndrome 1976

Unfortunately there isn't a vaccine against foxes so you will still need to keep them away from this nasty pest!

Suitability For An Egglu

The list we have provided is by no means exhaustive, there are a huge number of chicken breeds and we have left out those that are primarily bred for show, but it gives a fair cross section of what is available.

If you would like to research the different breeds in more detail, then we would recommend popping in to your library which should hold a copy of the British Poultry Standards. Alternatively you can order a copy of Poultry for Anyone by Victoria Roberts from Omlet which has good pictures and descriptions of over 90 breeds. The following magazines will also have a range of suppliers and breeders: Practical Poultry, Country Smallholder, The Smallholder.

How Much Should You Pay?

The price of chickens is fairly stable; movements in world stock markets, changes in governments or the results of Saturdays match tend not to affect things too much. Having said that prices do vary from place to place. Here is a rough guide to what you should be paying for a chicken at Point of Lay (meaning the chicken will lay the first egg in 4-6 weeks, also written abbreviated as P.O.L)

Hybrid	- £10 to £18
Pure breed	- £20 to £50
Bantam	- £20 to £50

Organic birds will attract a premium of around £5.

Table showing particulars of various breeds of chicken that you may come across:

Breed	Type	Weight	Egg colour	Eggs p.a.
HYBRID				
Black Rock	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300
Bovans Nera	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300
Calder Ranger	Hybrid	medium	Brown	300
Isa Brown	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300
Maran Cuivre	Hybrid	medium	Chestnut	200
Red Star	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300
Warren	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300
White Star	Hybrid	light	White	300
PURE BREED				
Andalusian	Pure breed	light	White	200
Ancona	Pure breed	light	White	200
Aruraucana	Pure breed	light	Greeny blue	150
Australorp	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Barnevelder	Pure breed	heavy	Brown	180
Brahma	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	150
Campine	Pure breed	light	White	200
Cochin	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	100
Derbyshire Redcap	Pure breed	light	Beige	200
Dorking	Pure breed	heavy	White	190
Faverolles	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Fayoumi	Pure breed	light	Beige	250
Friesian	Pure breed	light	White	230
Frizzle	Pure breed	Heavy	Beige	175
Hamburg	Pure breed	Light	White	200
Indian Game	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	100
Leghorn	Pure breed	light	White	240
Marans	Pure breed	heavy	Chestnut	200
Minorca	Pure breed	light	White	200
Old English Game	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	200
Orpington	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Plymouth Rock	Pure breed	medium	Beige	200
Poland	Pure breed	light	White	200
Rhode Island Red	Pure breed	heavy	Brown	260
Scots Dumpy	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Scots Grey	Pure breed	light	Beige	200
Silkie	Pure breed	light	Beige	150
Sussex	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	260
Welsummer	Pure breed	heavy	Reddish brown	200
Wyandotte	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	200
BANTAM				
Pekin	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Barbu D'Ucle	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Rosecomb	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Sebright	Bantam	light	Beige	<125

The Omlet Shop

In the Omlet shop you can find everything you need to keep your eglu and chickens in tip top condition. You can order more chicken food, browse for books on chickens and find unusual items such as egg timers and mini frying pans that make perfect gifts for hen-thusiasts. We also stock accessories for eglus and (probably) the worlds largest selection of egg cups!



Eglu Accessories

To enable you to create the perfect eglu we have designed a range of accessories. You can buy extensions for your run, different sized shades and extra feeders and drinkers.



Accessories

A full range of useful accessories such as a flexible, easy to erect netting for fencing off part of your garden and screw in pegs for securing the eglu to uneven ground.



Gifts

Whether you're choosing for yourself or looking for a present for someone with chickens the Omlet shop is sure to have something. From chicken cards and cockerel alarm clocks to doormats and doorstops the Omlet shop has it all.



Books

As you can imagine, chickens are a favourite theme among authors. We have a carefully edited selection of the best books available on looking after chickens, breed guides and even a book dedicated to cooking with eggs.



Feed

Omlet can supply you with all your chicken's food requirements delivered direct to your door. As well as the superb organic layers pellet that is the staple of their diet, we also have treats such as organic corn, meal worms and tubs of grit to ensure proper digestion and strong egg shells.



Health

Omlet's chickens are fully vaccinated for life and generally chickens are very hardy but they can, like any creature, occasionally feel a bit under the weather so we have a good selection of mainly natural tonics to help revive them.



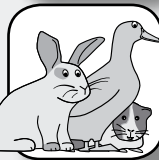
Kitchen and eggcups

With so many delicious fresh eggs every day you'll be busy in the kitchen! We have a range of fabulous kitchen gadgets for turning eggs into amazing cakes, souffles and of course a huge collection of egg cups for you to choose from.



Clothing

With a stylish eglu and equally chic chickens you will want to look your best when you're out in the garden. The Omlet shop comes to the rescue with a range of T-Shirts, fleeces and even aprons so you'll always look your best.



Eglus for other animals

If you have a guinea pig, rabbit or duck don't despair they can have an eglu too! Visit www.omlet.co.uk or call us on 0845 450 2056 and we'll happily tell you more.

Join the Omlet Club

The Omlet Website



A fantastic resource and a place to make new friends.

Need to know more about the eglu or keeping chickens? Then look no further than the Omlet website. You'll find sections on all our products and short video clips of the eglu in use. A breeds directory on the website features over 50 of the most popular and extraordinary varieties from all over the world. You will also find comprehensive guides covering everything from daily chicken routines to seasonal care and even a description of how an egg is formed.

The Omlet Club

As an eglu owner you will have access to the Omlet Club on the Omlet website. The club includes several areas including a forum, a gallery and a library of Omlet Newsletters. It's a hugely enjoyable and lively community where people with lots of experience of keeping chickens in eglus share tips and advice with people eagerly expecting their first egg.

The gallery pages are filled with pictures of eglus and chickens, there is a special area dedicated to images of "my first egg" and you can put names to faces in the "meet the eglu owners" pages. With well over a thousand members there's never a dull moment in the Omlet Club!



See more photos at club.omlet.co.uk/gallery

Omlet

To order these items please call
0845 450 2056
or you can order and pay securely online at
www.omlet.co.uk

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