

Coop Scoop Chicken Coop Tour

Saturday, June 4 from 9-11



1. The Chickens at Little Acre Farm (I call my place Little Acre Farm—because we live on .99 acre!)
I got my chickens in October 2009; prior to that, never had them.

The Coop:

My coop was inspired by Kevin Lord's (thanks Kevin!), but designed by me. I wanted something a little bigger than what Kevin had, but I loved the idea of the cleanout door on the side, and I loved that the coop was raised off the ground, allowing the birds to enjoy the shade underneath. I also loved the idea of tiles on the floor. I couldn't find any plans on the Internet that were quite what I wanted.

These were my design concepts/criteria:

- I wanted a 4x8 footprint, as that would be a good sized for 6-8 birds, which is what I wanted. I thought it would make the whole thing easier because plywood comes in 4x8 sheets. (Wasn't as easy as I thought!)
- I had some leftover corrugated plastic from a greenhouse-garden-shed we had built a few years ago, and I thought that using that in the roof would allow more light in.
- I wanted nest boxes that were easy to get to, with exterior doors.
- I thought I'd have the nest boxes at one end of the coop, the roosts at the other end, and the food somewhere in the middle.
- I wanted some kind of tiles or linoleum on the floor of the coop to help in keeping it clean.
- I wanted a large run because I didn't want to free range my birds. We have a lot of hawks around here, and my husband and I once watched one attack and eat a blue jay right near where the coop is. Since the coop has been there, I've seen hawks in the trees in the neighbor's yard that overlook our house—and the coop. We also have fishers and coyotes in the woods behind our house, so I'm not willing to let them free range unless there's a fenced-in area for them.
- I wanted to keep costs as low as possible.

My husband and I have never built anything in our lives, so this whole thing was a learning experience. For example, I planned on using $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood for the whole thing. But I discovered that's pretty heavy, and is overkill for some parts, like the roof and the nest boxes. And, I realized that instead of just slapping some plywood together, you have to account for the width of each piece of wood, and measure accordingly. –Same with every piece of wood used anywhere! So it wasn't as easy as screwing together a few pieces of 4x8-foot plywood. For example, for a 4x8 footprint (with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood), the floor actually had to be 46.5 inches wide. (Don't laugh, those of you who actually know how to build things!)

Here are some other things I learned:

- The corrugated plastic "skylight" allowed too much heat in, in the summer. I found I have to cover it with something in the hot summer months. In retrospect, I'm thinking I should have used some kind of insulated glass, and should have made it hinged, so I could open it in the summer. (But that would have greatly increased the cost—and probably the aggravation for novice builders.)
- I had Nan Norseen check the coop before it was completely finished, and she suggested a different configuration from the one I had in mind. She said that with the food in the middle, it would be difficult for me to reach, and she was right. So I put the nest boxes at one end, the food at the other, next to the cleanout door, and the roosts just behind the food. I later added some droppings boards under the roosts—also a Nan suggestion—and it has made cleanout fairly easy. (I covered the boards with some scrap linoleum to make cleaning them off easier.)
- I have only one door into the run, and would like to make another at the other end, to help make clearing out the run easier, and to offer some potential for sectioning off part of the run to help integrate new chicks to the flock.

My coop doesn't look nearly as nice as Kevin's, but it does the job. I don't have any cute windows in it. My "windows" are wooden cutouts covered with wire on the inside. I built a "window" into the cleanout door, and put wire inside, so I can open it in the summer to let the air in. I also made a similar "window" on the back wall. I think my coop could have benefited from another window.

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My run is 4 feet x 25 feet, and the 4x8-foot space under the coop is part of it, so with 8 birds originally, now 6, there's enough space that it's almost like free-ranging for them.

The flock:

I started out with 8 pullets raised by Nan Norseen. Nan got them from Erickson's in Acton, and as I recall, they were born between April and June 2009; I got them in October. I started with 2 each Buff Orpingtons and Brown Leghorns, and 1 each Barred Rock, Araucana, Speckled Sussex, and Silver-laced Wyandotte. Last summer I lost one of the leghorns to the heat, and over the winter I lost the other. I thought the others killed it, because it had a hole poked in its neck, but it could have died for some unknown reason and been pecked afterward.

During the spring and summer months we get more eggs than we can use, so we sell them to some friends. Production fell off over the winter, when the birds were molting, and we got 0-3 eggs a day. Now everyone is in full feather, and we get 3-5 eggs a day. Pre-molt, the Barred Rock was my best layer, post-molt, I'm not sure. That's because before the molt, her eggs were very distinctive—more oval, and a darker brown than the others. Now I think I can spot hers, because they do have a darker cast to them, but it's not as easy to tell, because they are shaped like the lighter ones that the others lay. It's easy to tell with the Araucana, since she lays light green eggs. She gives us an egg almost every day. All the others lay well too—I have no complaints! I was not impressed with the laying rate of the leghorns when I had them though. (Although one of them gave us huge eggs—even a couple of double-yolkers!)

Managing the flock:

I keep a light on in the coop—in winter it is on from about 4 a.m. to 7 p.m. In the summer it shuts off at 7 a.m.

I also have a heating tile connected to a thermostatically controlled plug. (It goes on when the temp. is around 35, and shuts off at 45.) I may consider insulating the coop somehow so I don't have to use the tile. I know a lot of people don't heat, but, as you know, we've had some mighty cold weather in the winter, and I didn't want to lose any birds to the cold. (I got the tile and the thermostatically controlled outlet at www.shopthecoop.com.)

I have a 1-gallon plastic self-waterer inside the coop, sitting on a cinder block so it's off the floor. I have a piece of chicken wire on the top of it, to keep the birds from climbing on top of it and soiling the water. I have a metal self-feeder hung on a chain from the ceiling so that it is about 2 inches off the floor. I covered the bucket with an inverted, large plastic flower pot to keep the birds from soiling the food. Outside, I have a large (3-gallon, maybe?) plastic self-waterer sitting on a cinder block. Once every couple of weeks I add a little apple cider vinegar to the water, as it's supposed to help keep them healthy. (There are lots of sources on the Internet for information on this; here's one I found: <http://poultrykeeper.com/common-articles-to-all-poultry/general/apple-cider-vinegar.html>)

I have a spare 1-gallon waterer that I use in the winter to swap out with the usually frozen one in the coop. In the winter, I bring in the big jug at night and fill it with warm water in the morning before bringing it back to the run. (It's heavy—I use a sled or a wagon for hauling it.)

Inside the coop, I have pine shavings on the floor and a thin layer of them on the droppings boards. I use hay in the nest boxes.

In the winter, the birds hate to walk in the snow, but they still love to go outside, except on the worst of the worst winter days. So I spread hay down for them, and it gives them something to walk on and scratch at. (The hay also keeps the smell down in the chicken yard. There's no really noticeable smell in the run.) By spring, there's a nice, thick layer in the run, and it attracts worms and grubs underneath—something for the birds to hunt and peck at. Last year about this time I raked up the litter on the floor of the run, because it looked rich and pretty well composted, and I put it around the herbs in my herb garden. I haven't done that this year—yet.

I feed the birds layer pellets that I get from Erickson's. I started feeding them organic food, but it was twice as expensive as the "regular" stuff. So, as much as I like the idea of everything organic, I bit the bullet on this one.

Because I don't free-range my birds, I give them lots of fresh greens when I can—weeds, dandelions—a lot of the things they'd be eating if they were free-ranging. They especially like comfrey, and I have a bunch of it planted around the run, which they peck at as they can reach it. Of course, I also give them gone-by (but not rotten or moldy) table scraps and fresh

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vegetable trimmings. Whatever “extras” I give them, I toss them into the run for them to scratch at. Last year I dried some of it to give them over the winter. I’m going to dry more this year (and will have to come up with somewhere to store it!).

I clean off the droppings boards weekly, and scoop out any large droppings from the floor. I “freshen” what’s on the floor with another thin layer of pine shavings. Once every couple of months or so I clean all the shavings out and start over. (I promise I’ll do this before the June 4 coop tour!) I also replace the hay in the nest boxes if they have any signs of feathers or poop in them. Otherwise, I “freshen” those by topping them off with a bit of new hay.

Next steps:

I haven’t actually raised birds from chicks yet, and I want to do this, but I need to have a setup to help integrate new pullets into the flock, and I haven’t created one yet. (Maybe this year.) I’d like to get another Barred Rock and one or two Australorps, which I’ve read are good layers. (Trouble is, where can I get just 2-3 birds?)

And I realize that to be a truly sustainable flock, I need a rooster so I can have my own chicks. But could I (and my neighbors) live with a rooster close at hand? And how would I manage hens hatching their own eggs?

In a sustainable flock, you also need to have a method to cull from the flock and a means to do it. If you have hens that lay different colored eggs, it’s easy to tell who needs to go, by tracking the number of each color egg you get. But if they’re all laying the same color, how do you tell? And, although Lynn and I learned how to butcher chickens last year, I’m not sure I’d want to go through that for just one bird at a time. Then there’s the psychology of it—could I slaughter one of my own birds that I’ve had for a few years? Maybe.

Harvey Ussery is a homesteader who writes for a number of different magazines, such as *Backyard Poultry* and *Mother Earth News*. He has some great ideas and advice on raising chickens, which you can find at his website:
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2. Chickens at One Acre Farm

Photo #1 This is where it all started. Now in disrepair, this was a movable coop which held the first 8 chickens we got 6 years ago. It was okay for summer, but in winter when they did not want to go out in the snow, they were stuck in there for long periods of time, and we thought it was too small for them. It also doesn't provide good protection from wind, and it was difficult to clean. Too many small nooks and crannies we couldn't reach.



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Photo #2: Here's a view of our current coop. It started as a 10 x 16 ft shed from Circle B Barns. My husband insulated it, and divided it into 3 rooms: a 10 x 8 ft chicken coop (currently houses 15 chickens), and 5 x 8 ft bunny house (houses 2 bunnies), and a 5 x 8 ft storage room for the animal feed, etc. He insulated it, added lots of windows, some nestboxes, a roost, shelves, etc. In the front, he built a totally enclosed 10 x 16 run, which is divided in half -- chickens get one half, and the bunnies get the other half. In the rear, he built an additional run for the chickens, 8 x 16 ft (pic #8).

We love this walk-in coop. It is easy to clean, and provides the occupants with excellent protection from the weather, and plenty of space. I'm sure there are people who would cram 30 or more birds in there, but I cannot emphasize enough the benefits of lots of space per bird. There is much less conflict and feather picking, and they are not forced to wallow in their own poop. Also, remember that in winter, they often don't want to go out due to snow, wind, or extreme cold, and for hours on end they have no place to go but the coop. Figure that in when you decide how large a coop for the number of birds you want.



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Photo #3 Here, the door to the front run is open, and the birds are hanging around the doorway. In the middle of the pic you can see a pop door between the bunny run (see white bunny behind it), which is open at the moment, to allow bunnies to access the outdoors by going through the chicken run.



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Photo #4 Inside the coop, you can see the hanging feeder, the waterer, and the nestboxes. No, that is not poop smear all over the nestbox walls. The wood used for the boxes was scrap wood, and it was all marked up with god knows what before it was ever a set of nestboxes. We do not heat the coop. Instead, we choose cold hardy breeds which are appropriate for this climate. We do have electricity in the coop, mostly to power the water heater to keep it from freezing in winter. We have a light in there, but it is only for us, in case we have to go in there after dark. We do not keep the light on at night. My goal in caring for animals is to replicate natural conditions as much as possible, which includes allowing them to experience a natural day/night schedule from season to season, and letting them rest during winter. It has also been good to remind ourselves of the change in food availability by season, which our ancestors had to cope with. I want my kids to understand natural cycles and how they relate to sustainability. We eat lots of eggs in spring, when our birds are in full scale production mode, and far fewer in winter while they rest: We cannot always have everything we want!



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Photo #5 Here's a view of the roost. Rustic, but functional. It can be raised up to facilitate cleaning. Yes, that is poop smeared all over the back wall. Some of the chickens like to roost at the very top, where the s*** hits the wall, so to speak. If you use a ladder style roost like this, be sure the angle is gentle. A steep angle will position the birds so that they poop on each other's backs while sleeping.



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Photo #6: Virtually every afternoon during spring, summer, and fall, the chickens and bunnies get to "free range" in this 1/3 acre fenced in area. The fence is made of 4 ft high plastic coated chicken wire. It is not predator proof, but it keeps our animals contained, so they won't wander off into a fox's mouth. We let them out only when we are home, and as you can see, many windows look out into it, so we can keep watch while in the house. A fox or fisher or coyote could easily get over the fence, so we pop outside and make noise fairly frequently, and this helps to deter predators. Often, someone is out gardening while the chickens and rabbits are out. Hawks are a constant threat, of course, but the shrubs and apple trees provide pretty good cover, to which everyone runs in case of aerial attack. Note the composting bins behind the apple trees. The chickens LOVE to forage for kitchen scraps, worms, and other bugs in the compost, and spend a lot of time there. Note that the bins are between the trees and the house -- this is quite a safe area. A hawk would have to work really, really hard to get them there, and a coyote, fox, or fisher, would have to be VERY bold. The trees and shrubs provide additional benefits:

They provide needed shade in summer.

They provide more foraging opportunities. A greater variety of vegetation attracts a wider variety of bugs for the chickens to eat. The blueberry bushes provide them with scrumptious berries -- the chickens hop up and snatch the berries with their beaks. Both the chickens and the bunnies eat the fallen apples in autumn.



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Photo 7: Here is a view of the yard from another angle so you can see the fence. Note that there is no vegetation close to the fence. This is important. You want the fence clear, so you can see any predators which sneak up. Shrubs just outside the fence would give a fox a nice hiding place while awaiting the perfect moment to hop on in for dinner. A tree would give climbing predators, like fishers and raccoons, a nice hiding place. Any trees and shrubs in the chicken yard should be near the center of the yard, or near your house, so they benefit the chickens without benefiting predators.



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Photo #8: This is the 8 x 16 ft chicken run in the rear of the coop. The birds much prefer this rear run to the front run. It has a corrugated plastic roof, which keeps out rain and snow but allows sunlight to penetrate for warmth in winter. In summer, shade from deciduous trees make this a cool spot. There is also an extra feeder back there. Having feeders in more than one place is a plus, because it prevents a bully from excluding a subordinate bird from the food. In summer we usually put a second waterer in the rear run, too, just to make sure everyone has enough opportunity to drink.

Photo #9 This is a wild turkey who frequents our yard, and one day flew over the fence and spent the afternoon with our chickens and bunnies. I think she figured out that predators don't bother anyone here, due to the set up, and to our constant outdoor activity. Funny, the wild rabbits are the same way. They can't get into the chicken/bunny yard, but they literally lie down for naps right outside the fence, as if they haven't a care in the world.



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4. Jenni-Pie Farms – 581 Sugar Road

Coop Owners are Leigh , Jenni, and Kevin Lord

The Coop

Our chicken coop was built based on some plans I found on the internet. I modified them to lower the cost of the coop by substituting 2X3 SPF studs for cedar decking and stained the SPF for wood protection. I also added a large door on the back side for cleanout and added linoleum tiles to the coop floor for easy cleaning. I highly recommend the tiles on the floor, they are great. We started out with 5 chickens and it worked OK until they started competing for nest box space, so I put an addition on 2 years ago to add 3 nest boxes to the main hen house. I then wanted to add a little more space for them to move around while being in the coop, so I added an addition out the back for more protected area. We also use that rear space to separate the pullets we are raising to add to our flock from the fully grown hens. This way they are with the flock and the fully grown hens see them and acclimate to them, but they cant get to them to pick on them while they are still growing.

Our Flock

Our flock started as all Buff Orpington pullets from Cackle Hatchery. They were great layers, perfect eggs and lots of them, and very quiet chickens but they molted about a year later and stopped laying within 2 years. We lost one chicken to a sudden death, cause unknown, and the other 2 to foxes. I'd like to cull out the remaining 2 Buffs due to lack of production but Jenni refuses to give them up. We added in 2 Black Australorps about 2 years ago. They are OK layers but lay thin shelled funny shaped eggs, even after adding oyster shells to their diet to try to solidify the shells over a year ago. This year we are adding 3 Red Star Sex Links and 2 Barred Rocks. We are adding the Sex Links for their good egg production and the Barred Rocks because we like the colors! Jenni has had an egg business for the last 3 years, where she sells her eggs to people in town, but due to the slow down in production the egg sales have dropped off. We brought in the 5 new chicks this winter to get the business back on track. We should be back in full production by September. I would expect about 5-6 eggs a day from the 7 laying hens.

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