

# **Interesting Chicken Facts**



**I didn't  
know  
that!**

# 1. Chickens Have Their Own Language



Chickens Have Their Own Language. There are at least 24 different sounds that chickens make and maybe as many as 30. They include: All is well, Help, I'm miserable, I'm happy, I found food, Stay close, I have to lay an egg, I just laid an egg, Leave me alone, Seriously, leave me alone, Let's stick together, Let's sleep here, We're about to have sex, I'm the boss, Be alert, Pay attention, Danger, Run for cover, and Let's go!

## 2. Chickens Only Have One “Hole”



Chickens Only Have One “Hole”. Did you ever wonder where eggs really come from? Chickens (and all poultry) only have one "exit" on their back end. Chickens poop, "pee", lay eggs, and have sex with that one hole. The hole is called the cloaca.

But before you cringe, nature has a way of protecting the egg. The egg moves down the oviduct, which is connected to the large intestine near the anus, or "vent". When the egg comes out, the oviduct prolapses, or protrudes around the vent to protect it from mixing with feces.

So when someone says that a chicken is the animal that poops breakfast, it's true



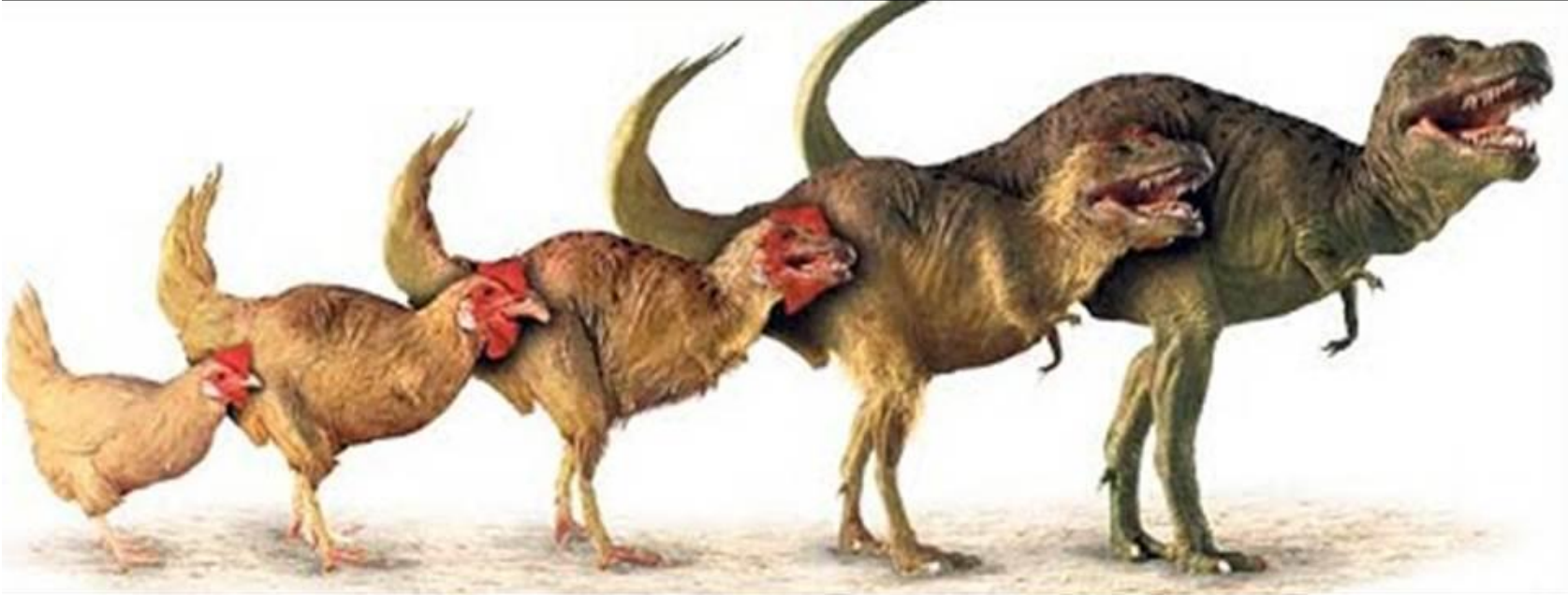
### 3. Retained Fertility



Retained Fertility. After a hen successfully mates, sperm is stored in chambers called the Utero-Vaginal Junction and the Infundibulum. It's stored and remains viable for up to 4 weeks. So with one mating, the hen can lay an entire clutch of fertile eggs before starting to incubate them.

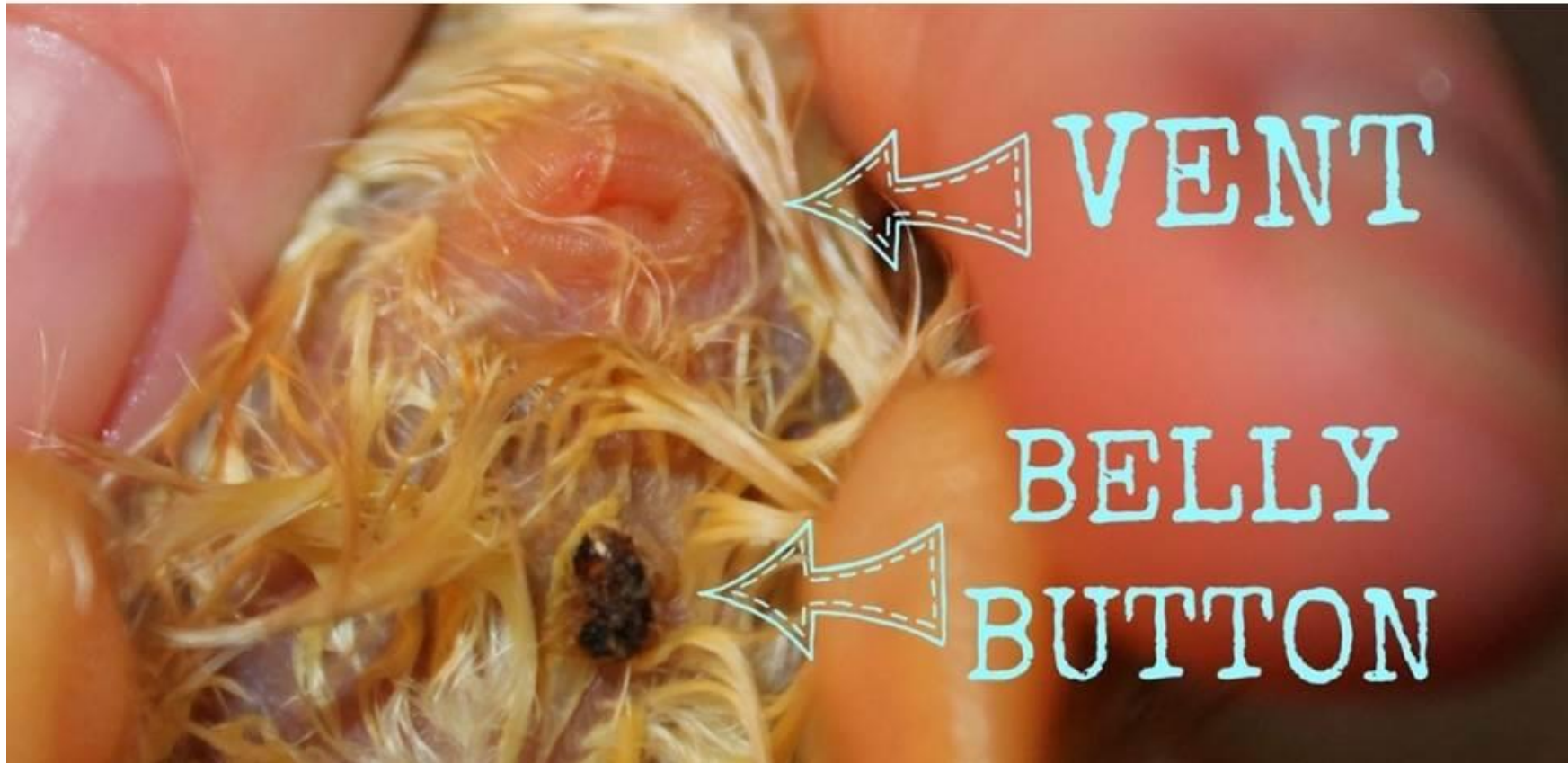
By the way, a hen doesn't need a rooster to lay eggs, and fertilized eggs taste no different than unfertilized eggs. Also, a fertilized egg won't turn into a chick unless it's heated to 100 degrees F at 60% humidity for 21 days.

## 4. Relative of the Dinosaur



Relative of the Dinosaur. Scientific DNA comparisons confirm that the T-Rex shares a common ancestry with chickens. Bone structures are also very similar. And chicken legs are covered in snake-like scales. Fortunately, chickens are a LOT friendlier!

## 5. Chickens Have Belly Buttons



Belly Buttons. A chick develops in the shell from the white, or albumen, of the egg. The developing embryo is connected to the yolk. A couple of days before a chick hatches, it absorbs the yolk. The yolk gives the chick fluids and nutrition for the first 3 days of its life. So after the yolk is absorbed, the chick is left with a belly button. But don't look for it; the scar that's left after absorption heals over and becomes virtually invisible.



## 7. Most Chicks are Born on Monday



Chicks are Built to Last. Chicks can live the first 3 days of their life without food or water. This is because they absorb the yolk just before hatching, giving them fluids and nutrition. This is why chicks can be sent in the mail and arrive alive and chirping. Chicks hatch, are put in the mail the next day, and arrive 1 or 2 days later. By the way, only the US Postal Service will ship chicks. And if you order any, be prepared to pick them up at the Post Office at 5:30 am when they arrive!

## 6. Chicks are Built to Last (For 3 Days)



Most Chicks are Born on Monday. Hatcheries want to get chicks in the mail early in the week so they will arrive before the weekend. So they begin the 21 day incubation period on a Monday and the chicks hatch 3 weeks later on Monday (or Sunday or Tuesday, but you get the point). Hatch on Monday, in the mail on Tuesday, and they arrive Wednesday or Thursday. So next time you eat chicken, you can be fairly sure it was born early in the week!

Also, if you're looking for discounted chicks at your local farm store, shop early in the week. They'll be picking up lots of new chicks on Wednesday or Thursday, and will want to get rid of the older chicks to make room.



## 8. Enhanced Eyesight



Enhanced Eyesight. Like humans, chickens see red, green, and blue light waves. But unlike humans, chickens have tetra-chromatic vision, meaning they see a 4th band of light: Ultraviolet. Ultraviolet waves come from the sun, and make most insects, spiders, and micro organisms glow. When chickens scratch and peck in the yard, it's not random. They can see insects and microbes glowing like a disco ball, or like the reflections from glitter. However, chickens have poor night vision, and have poor perception of non-moving objects.

## 9. Molting



Molting. Molting is similar to a dog shedding. At about a chicken's second autumn, they will regenerate old worn out feathers to get ready for winter. Some lose all their feathers at once and regrow in a couple of weeks, while others will drag out the process for 2-3 months. Because feathers are mostly protein, like eggs, chickens will often stop laying eggs while their body focuses on feather growth. Chickens can be uncomfortable during molt, but will continue to eat and drink normally. Often chickens are fed a higher protein feed or protein snacks such as sunflower seeds.

## 10. Long Lives



Long Lives. Chickens can live 15 years or longer. However, after 3 years, their egg production is cut in half, and chickens rarely lay eggs after 5 years. Most egg farmers will cull layers that are 1.5 to 2 years, and they become fertilizer and pet food.

Old hens aren't very tender, but have a deep flavor. That makes them great for stock and soup (like chicken and dumplings!). However, because chickens are culled at a young age, you won't find any old hens at the grocery store. So if you want the tastiest soup or stock and find someone selling an old hen, buy it!



## 11. Cold Tolerant



Cold Tolerant. Most common chicken breeds can tolerate temperatures down to -20F. While they can tolerate the cold, moisture and wind can be deadly. Coops should have good ventilation without being breezy. And never use heat lamps. Coops are dusty, and dusty heat lamps can result in a fire.

## 12. Why are Store Eggs White?

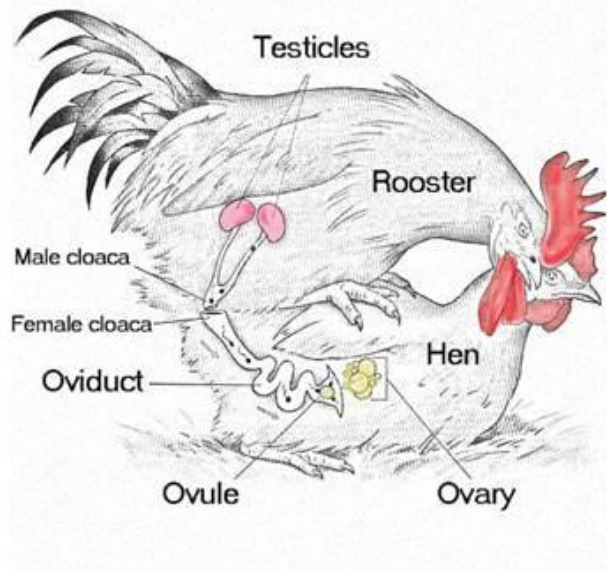


Why are Store Eggs White? Chickens lay different colored eggs, including white, brown, cream, blue, green, and pink. So why are most eggs in the grocery store white? As you might guess, it's all about business cost. White store eggs are laid by the White Leghorn. The leghorn is one of the best layers, laying up to 300 large eggs per year. They have a small slender body, so they eat less and take up less space. And they have large combs, which helps to get rid of body heat in warm climates. More eggs for less money means cheaper eggs at the store.

By the way, color makes no difference in the taste or nutrition of the egg. The difference is the chicken's environment and egg freshness. Chickens that aren't confined to a barn eat a wider variety of food, including grass, and insects, resulting in darker yolks and tastier eggs. Also, store eggs can be almost 2 months old when purchased, while eggs from a local farm are usually a week old or less.



## 13. Chicken Sex



Chicken Sex. Maybe you never wondered how chickens have sex, but it seems almost impossible that it happens at all! Roosters and hens have basically the same equipment, the cloaca (remember Interesting Chicken Facts #3?). The cloaca is also called the vent, where feces are expelled. When chickens mate, the rooster usually calls a hen by saying he's found some food. Then he lowers a wing and begins a circular dance around the hen, indicating he's about to mount her.



ONLY IF SHE IS WILLING, she will lower her head and lift her back end. The rooster will mount her with his feet on her back and wings, steadying himself by biting the hen's neck feathers. Then he lowers his back end around the hen's tail feathers to make contact with her cloaca.

The rooster does not have a penis, but he does have a small nub just inside his cloaca that passes sperm to the hen. While balancing and contorting, the rooster somehow hits the mark within about 3 seconds!

By the way, chickens are not monogamous, but roosters do have favorites, and will prevent other roosters from mating with his girls.

## 14. Can Chickens Fly?



Can Chickens Fly? The answer is a qualified “yes”! Chickens have wings, but are generally not built for sustained flight like a songbird or hawk. However, they can use their wings to help them reach a low branch or clear an obstacle such as a fence. Some chicken owners trim the feathers of one wing to throw the chicken off balance. But we found that this is only a short term fix, since they eventually adjust.

The average chicken can jump vertically over 2 feet. Using their wings can easily add another couple of feet. Lighter breeds can jump even higher. So a 4 foot high fence is worthless to keep chickens in. And if you have chickens near berries, grapes, or tomatoes, nothing is safe below 5 feet!

## 15. Chickens are NOT Vegetarians



Chickens are NOT Vegetarians. Chickens are omnivores. They eat meat, vegetables, fruit, grains, and as many bugs as they can catch! They will even eat mice, lizards, and small snakes. As bad as it may sound, chickens LOVE chicken! And beef and pork and fish and turkey. Instead of the garbage can, chickens are a great way to dispose of kitchen scraps, moldy leftovers, and stale bread. And don't be fooled by egg cartons that advertise "Vegetarian Fed". The label is meant to appeal to the consumer, while artificially limiting the natural diet of the chicken.



## 16. Chickens Poop A LOT!



Chickens Poop a LOT! Chickens make about 1/3 pound of poop per day. While that doesn't sound like a lot, it adds up. Consider the modern chicken barn used to raise meat chickens. They are designed to give each chicken about 2/3 of a square foot, about the size of sheet of notebook paper. The barn houses about 35,000 chickens. By the end of their short lives of about 55 days, each chicken has produced about 18 pounds of poop in the space of a sheet of paper. The chickens together have produced over 320 TONS of poop. When you buy raw chicken, you are warned to fully cook it to avoid getting salmonella. Can you guess how salmonella is transmitted? That's right, in poop. By the way, there are about 23 BILLION chickens in the world.

## 17. Chickens Were Once Encouraged

**Uncle Sam Expects You  
To Keep Hens and Raise Chickens**



**Two Hens in the Back Yard for Each Person  
in the House Will Keep a Family  
In Fresh Eggs**

**E**VEN the smallest back yard has room for a flock large enough to supply the house with eggs. The cost of maintaining such a flock is small. Table and kitchen waste provide much of the feed for the hens. They require little attention—only a few minutes a day.

An interested child, old enough to take a little responsibility, can care for a few fowls as well as a grown person.

Every back yard in the United States should contribute its share to a bumper crop of poultry and eggs in 1918.

**In Time of Peace a Profitable Recreation  
In Time of War a Patriotic Duty**

*For information about methods of Back-Yard Poultry Keeping suited to your location and conditions, write*

**Your State Agricultural College  
or  
The United States Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D. C.**

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Chickens Were Once Encouraged. During World War I, the US Government published full page ads in agricultural magazines encouraging Americans to own chickens. One ad was titled “Uncle Sam Expects You to Keep Hens and Raise Chickens”. The recommendation was two chickens per household member. Many families had no refrigeration in 1918, so a fresh chicken egg was a daily dose of protein. The ad called owning chickens a “Patriotic Duty”! Fast forward 100 years, and now we have to fight local government for the ability to own chickens.

## 18. Dust Baths



Dust Baths. Chickens LOVE to take dust baths. The chicken digs out a hole in loose dirt big enough for their body. Then they lie on their side and kick dirt onto their body while flapping a wing to get it all over them. A dust bath helps to remove excess oil, and reduces external parasites like lice and mites. It also maintains the water resistance of the outer feathers. Many novice chicken owners who aren't aware of dust bathing often become concerned when they first see it, since it looks like their chicken is having a convulsive seizure. But a dust bathing chicken is a happy chicken, making them "clean" with dirt.



## 19. Chickens are Nature's Tillers



Chickens are Nature's Tillers. A chicken spends its day scratching in search of food. All this scratching makes the chicken a natural soil tiller. One chicken can prepare 50 sq ft of garden space per month. Need 500 sq ft? Use 10 chickens! Surround the garden with a portable fence to keep them in, give them some shelter for shade and protection from aerial predators, and watch them work. In a month, the ground will be free of vegetation, free of bugs and grubs, tilled, fertilized, and ready for planting. And if you compost, chickens love to help by turning the heap. Chickens hate piles, and will work all day to flatten it (searching for food). Pile it up in the evening, and they'll repeat the process in the morning. There's a reason that every pioneer homestead had chickens. It wasn't just for food; they were outstanding farmhands. And still are!

## 20. Eggs Come in Many Colors



Eggs Come in Many Colors. Chicken eggs can be white, brown, dark brown, blue, pink, and olive green colors. All eggs start out white in color. Those that are laid in shades other than white have pigments deposited on them as the eggs travel through the hen's oviduct. The journey through the chicken's oviduct takes approximately 26 hours. The shell takes roughly 20 hours to complete.

Ameraucana birds have the pigment oocyanin deposited on the egg as it travels through the oviduct. This pigment permeates the egg shell resulting in the interior and exterior of the egg being the same blue color. Chickens that lay brown tinted eggs deposit the pigment protoporphyrin on the eggs late in

the process of forming the shell. The pigment therefore does not penetrate the interior of the egg, but tints only the surface of the egg, which is why brown eggs are white on the interior. In the case of an olive colored egg, a brown pigment overlays a blue egg shell resulting in a green egg. The darker the brown pigment, the more olive color of the resulting egg.

But in the same environment, all eggs are the same on the inside. So buy the freshest farm eggs you can find!

**THE  
END!**

