



GIVE A HEN A HOME – HEN CARE SHEET

Congratulations on rehoming your new ex commercial barn hens! If you're new to rescuing hens (Ex commercial hens from a Battery system, /Free range, or Barn kept hens) or new to hen keeping in general, then this care sheet will go through all the basics you need to care for your hens properly.

Hopefully before making the decision to rescue some hens, you will have done your own through research as you would taking on any new animal. Firstly to check if its right for you and you have the right set up along with arming yourself with relevant health care information so you can help keep your hens in good health and deal with any ailments as they come up along with knowing what to look for to prevent illnesses or parasites.

THE HENS

Your new hens are a hybrid warren breed often referred to as Isa Brown's they will be approximately 18 months old. These are the most popular breed that commercial farms use for laying eggs.

A little about their background..

They will of been born at a hatchery then transported as 'point of lay' birds (approx 20 weeks old) to the farms then lived there for the next 14 months.

If battery hens they live in what is now called an enriched cage system something worth looking up online and a far cry from what a Hen really needs. Not enough space, No enrichment for their active brains and often pecking from other bored hens in the same cage as them.

A barn hen will live in a darkened barn often with timed artificial lighting to encourage laying and will be amongst anything from 500 hens to thousands of hens depending of the size of the barn and scale of the farm. These often have dropping boards where their feaces fall through! And that is only cleared out once the hens are rehomed, therefore there is often a high level of ammonia, they often have feed on a conveyor belt style feeder and water on automatic drinkers. No sunshine, no grass and very little fresh air.

Free range can be true free range or can be a large barn with 1000's of hens with a number of small openings, some go out some often don't get through the crowds to get out.

The hens may be very pale with floppy or straight combs. Within a month, you should notice that their faces start to get more colour, and their combs may shrink and straighten up. Some of your hens may also be tatty or feather-bare. This is generally due to feather-plucking by other hens or out of boredom, Calcium deficiency along with the temperature of the barns can take them longer to grow back feathers. You will notice that they start to regrow their feathers fairly quickly once they get home, even the very bald hens, its very rewarding to watch their transformation.

Their instincts come back very quickly, ie taking a dust bath, pecking around and sunbathing! However their fitness/agility may take longer so do take this info consideration especially if you have a ramp or ladders up to your coop.

Given time, though, the vast majority of ex-battery, barn kept and ex free range hens make a great recovery.

THE FIRST FEW DAYS

When you get your hens home, it is vital that they are given some time and space to adjust to their new life. Some will be more scared and shell shocked than others it can vary from each group sometimes we get some quite bold hens who are inquisitive and brave straight away.

Remember, absolutely everything is new and can be frightening to them. When you get them home, pop them in their run with some food and water, and watch from afar, resisting the urge to pick them up and cuddle them etc.. They have never really been handled except from today when they were grabbed by the farmer from the world they have known.

They do tame up pretty quickly and enjoy following you around and being picked up in time..food helps with this!

I say they are like dogs with wings! Always interested in what you are doing and they are keen to help with gardening.

You may find that there is a little scuffling in the first few days. This is perfectly normal as they establish a pecking

order (i.e. who is going to be the boss!). If there is excessive comb pulling, a little Vaseline smeared on can prevent the

dominant hen from getting a grip. If you have some hens with pin feathers growing through purple spray is essential and the other hens will keep pulling out the new growth otherwise.

Some fighting can be avoided by having two or more food and drink stations and a place for the more timid hens to hide while they gain in confidence.

You may also find that egg laying tails off for a few weeks. This is perfectly normal while they adjust to their new

environment, and should pick up again after a while. Most will go onto lay well some may never lay again or until after their next moult.

To us eggs are just an added bonus of having these feathered friends in our lives and that is what we feel rescuing should be about. These girls have already served their lives just giving everything they have because people want their eggs. Quite literally depleting their little bodies of calcium to create an egg day after day, deprived from a natural life just to keep providing eggs for consumers. Now is their time to experience life and to thrive.

FOOD

Your hens are used the same feed they have always had and it is best to stick to this whilst they adjust to their new life.

They often don't recognise anything else as food, which can be worrying for a new owner. If you eventually want to

feed them pellets instead of mash, you can add a few in at a time until the hens get used to them and accept them. As

tempting as it is, it's best not to offer them any treats for the first week or so, to avoid digestive upsets. Eventually, they

can enjoy treats (fed sparingly) such as mixed corn (corn is fattening with little nutritious value and heating as it takes longer to digest so sparing during summer especially) mealworms, fruit and veg, boiled/scrambled/raw egg - packed with nutrients. They can eat the shells too a great source of calcium.

Only feed treats in the late afternoon though, when they've eaten their 'real' food as in pellets/mash there are essential vitamins and minerals to give them a balanced diet and provide what they need.

*The Free range hens we rehome have been fed pellets on the farm – The Barn hens have usually been fed on dry layers mash.

Most hens seem to want to eat and drink a a lot when they first get home and for atleast the first week or two, you can always dampen mash or pellets too to aid hydration. This will spoil quicker in the hotter months though.

They will settle down and start to self regulate with food and water once they realise its always available and less competition from other hens to get it.

GRIT

Grit comes in two forms – soluble and insoluble. Because hens don't have teeth, they need a constant supply of grit to

enable their gizzard (a big strong muscle) to grind up their food ready for digestion. Soluble grit is often referred to as

oyster shell and is absorbed by the hens' bodies to aid shell formation. Insoluble grit stays in the gizzard to aid digestion,

until it is passed through their systems and replaced. Free-range hens often find enough grit on the ground, but hens

who spend part of their time in a run will need it offered either mixed in with food or in a separate bowl for free choice access either way it's a great idea to always have it available to them.

SUBSTRATE/BEDDING

You may want to use substrate in your run/coop to give the hens something to scratch in and lie down on. Many people find hardwood chips woodshavings, Easichick or equine products like Aubiose, Easibed and Hemcore are great, and make poo-picking a lot easier. Dust-extracted chopped straw like Dengie Freshbed or sawdust is perfect in nesting boxes.

Bark chips/soft wood or treated varieties are not recommended for the run/coop because they often contain/harbor mold spores which can affect delicate lungs, the treated type are toxic.

Hay/straw are also not recommended in the coop/nesting box due to dust along with being a good habitat for critters like mites!

HEALTH

All your hens have been vaccinated as chicks before making it to the farm they lived at, the common vaccinations are

usually Salmonella, Newcastle Disease, infectious bronchitis and Marek's Disease.

It is very helpful to get to know each hen and to perform a quick health check in the morning to make sure her crop

is empty and her abdomen is her usual size. This will alert you to any potential health problems. If there is no food left in the coop over night the hens crops should be empty by morning if not then this is a health issue Sour crop/Impacted crop. Ex commercial hens sadly due to their breeding can suffer from reproductive issues so keeping an eye on their abdomen size/shape and feel so you know what their normal is, is good practice.

WORMING

You should worm your hens only when needed to avoid worm resistance to chemicals.

We advise you in the first instance to run a worm count test. You can order these from Westgate Labs or Feclab and PooPost

They send you a pack so you can take a mixed sample of the droppings from your birds and send off to the labs for testing.

This will give you a report of the level of worm eggs found and advise you if you need to worm at that time or not.

Saying that if you have your new hens separate for a week in quarantine there is no harm in worming them and worm counting there after as farms often do not worm their hens so some do carry a worms burden.

What to use to worm your hens - Flubenvet Chemical wormer - This is the only licensed poultry wormer. It's available online as a powder or as part of a layers Pellet feed (Farm and Pet place online as usually the best value and they also sell 5kg bags for those with smaller flocks.

There is Verm-x Poultry Liquid or Pellet form, they also sell layers pellets with this mixed in now. This can support intestinal hygiene helping make it inhospitable for parasites.

There is a lot of information online and in books about chicken health. The most common illnesses/ailments/parasites found in Ex commercial hens are below, you may want to research these then you are more clued up incase you ever come across these.

Sour Crop

Impacted Crop

Mites

Lice

Worms

Egg Yolk Peritonitis (EYP)

Internal Tumour

Respiratory Infection

Acetias

Laying issues inc, Egg Bound, Soft shell egg, Thin shells

Bumblefoot

If in doubt, SEE A VET. on our website we have a page of recommended chicken friendly vets in Lancashire and surrounding areas.

PREDATORS

Foxes are the natural enemy of chickens and even if you think you don't have foxes near you, in all likelihood you do.

PLEASE be extra careful if your hens are allowed to free-range as a fox attack can happen at any time, day or night,

and the results can be devastating. It is easy to get complacent, but 30 seconds is all it takes for a fox to kill a hen or take one. If you are not with your hens (even if you are in the house) it is a risk you can keep them secure in a run, a fully enclosed garden or, with larger groups, electric fencing works very well.

Rats can soon set up camp and multiply if you leave feed and water about so best to keep things clean and tidy and remove food and water at night. They will steal eggs and can attack small birds/chicks and will dig under runs to get in so the same advice to keep foxes and rats out of housing and walk in runs use a good quality strong weld mesh NOT chicken wire. You want to choose a 16 gauge with small holes min 1 inch by 1/2 inch, you can line the floor of runs under flags/woodchip and do a mesh skirt around the edge of the run and bury this into the ground to discourage them digging under to get in. Placing flags small rocks around the edge can help also.

LICE/RED MITE

Lice hens can suffer from lice similar to dogs and cats with fleas, you may see these crawling on your hens or you may see clusters of white eggs around the feathers near your hens vent.

Hens often dustbathe to help keep parasites like this at bay, you can use lice powder or you can speak to your vet about ivermectin drops, you can also obtain a weaker strength drop called Harkeremectin online.

There is also good spray available by Johnsons called antimitex extra.

Redmite often the scourge of the hen owner, as it can be hard to get rid of. Not to be confused by the red spider mites we often see on our bricks in summer, red mite live in

dark nooks and crannies of hen coops and come out at night to feed on the hens' blood. If your hens seem reluctant to go into the coop at night, or are miserable, hunched or pale, then you may have red mite.

One way to check is to go out after dark with a torch and check inside the coop. Red mite will be visible crawling around. Another way to check is to run a clean white tissue under your perches and into the corners. If you see any red smears, you have red mite.

You can tie wrap a toilet roll with scrunched up paper or corrugated cardboard then check that the next day.

Another tell tale sign is ash like deposits in the hens living area, this is red mite faeces.

There are numerous products for eradicating the mites the gold standard now is a product called Exolt you would treat them early spring and then you can treat again late summer if required. You need to get this from your vet. We still advise treating your coop before and in-between treatments.

Red mite is better to get ahead of before you have a big infestation. They can be deadly to your hens. For more information please read the Red Mite information page on our website.

Now you have a good basis in what to look for how to care for your hens and help them settle.

Good luck with your new rescue hens and thank you so much for giving them the chance of a happy retirement! Please post some pictures of your girls in their new homes to the ['Give a Hen a Home' Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/savehens/). www.facebook.com/savehens/ there will be a post after each rehome date where you can add your photos. We love to see them in their new homes.

For further information on some of the points above please take a look around our website and also see our [additional links page](#).

[Check our website](#) for a list and links to Recommended tried and tested products

GIVEAHENAHOME.CO.UK