



Entertaining the Flock

Chickens need stimulating environments to thrive.

While a chicken's natural tendency is to range and roam, searching for bugs and taking dust baths in the dirt, it's safer and more practical to keep chickens confined to a pen. However, one can still create a stimulating environment where chickens can thrive.

The wild ancestors of today's chickens spent most of their time searching for food, interacting with other members of the flock, and exploring their surroundings. Domestic chickens have the same need for activity and when they don't get it, they can sometimes develop problem behaviors. Bullying, feather picking, egg eating, and other unwanted habits may occur when chickens are not housed in a stimulating environment.

Here are some ways to stimulate chicken activity:

Mix it up. If you only have hens in your flock, the first action you can take is to add a rooster to the group. It's more natural for hens to live with a rooster. Roosters court hens with fun-to-watch shuffle dances and by bringing them morsels of food. They are also good at breaking up fights between hens and gathering them up when it's time to roost at the end of the day. Hens appear more content in a coup when a rooster is running the show.

Provide toys. Cats and dogs aren't the only ones who enjoy playing with toys. Chickens find them entertaining too. Some of the best toys for chickens are hanging mirrors, baby rattles, and colorful cat toys (noisy balls and fake mice). Cat tunnels can be great fun for chickens too. Experiment with different toys to see which ones your chickens play with the most.

Places to perch. Chickens like having different spots where they can perch. Placing elevated areas around the pen will give them a chance to sit in different places. Some perching possibilities are a bale of straw, a sawhorse, a chicken swing made from rope, and a 2x4.

Treats. You may already be giving treats to your chickens, but you can give them something more to do by making them work for it. Get a dog or cat treat dispenser that drops bits of food when the animal rolls it around. Although designed for four-legged pets, chickens are good at figuring these out too. You can put all kinds of goodies inside, like blueberries, dried mealworms, or poultry pellets.

Dust baths. When given the opportunity, chickens will take dust baths, providing hours of entertainment—for both chickens and you. To make a dust bath, place a spare tire or a large pan inside the pen and fill it with fine dirt, being careful not to pack it too tight. The top layer of dirt should be loose enough to move around. Your chickens will quickly discover that they can flutter around in the pan. To help deter mites from your coup, add human-grade diatomaceous earth to the dirt.



Keeping your chickens occupied with these activities and other changes to their environment will occupy them for hours. And, just might entertain you also!

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