

Backyard Chickens

WRITTEN BY: LAURIE JARMER

For years there's been the unanswered question of "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Maybe another unanswered question is "Why do people want backyard chickens?"

Currently, the city of Tualatin does not allow backyard chickens. Several years ago an ordinance was drafted by the city to change that law but it was tabled because it was felt by the city council that there didn't seem to be much community interest in the issue.

There is now a group formed that is working on bringing this draft back before city council to change the city code and allow backyard chickens.

We aren't that far away from the generation where having a few chickens in your yard was common, no matter where you lived. During World War I and II our federal government encouraged Americans to be self sufficient, patriotic and not waste valuable resources. There were even posters printed that state, "Uncle Same Expects You to Keep Hens and Raise Chickens." Once again many Americans have a desire for sustainable living. We not only want to buy local but we want to produce local. We want to know where our food comes from and if possible produce our own food. Hence, the return to organic gardening and what goes hand in hand with gardening – chickens.

Factory farms raise thousands to tens of thousands of chickens in a single location, where living space for chickens is cramped. Many times what's found in super-market chickens and their eggs are antibiotics, pesticides, chlorine and other unnatural substances. Backyard chickens, on the other hand, forage on chemical free vegetation and insects.

Just a few weeks ago, one of the Portland news stations reported on the problem with a new insect infestation in our area, the brown marmorated stink

bug. There doesn't seem to be an effective treatment plan for ridding our area of the bugs yet, but guess what, backyard chickens gobble them right up. As with many other pests: crane flies, slugs, fleas, ticks, spiders, etc., chickens are a great asset in the battle to get rid of them.

The best part about keeping chickens is the eggs they produce (and no, you do not need a rooster for a hen to lay eggs). The eggs from backyard chickens are healthier and taste better. Egg yolks are firmer, more yellow, and have a rich flavor. The shells are even thicker. Some studies have shown that pastured chickens (those raised naturally on grass and insects) have 1/3rd less Cholesterol and 1/4th less saturated fat than chickens raised in factory farms.

Another real bonus of backyard chickens is the countless hours of wholesome backyard entertainment. Many people who have backyard chickens think of them as pets. They greet you when you come out to visit them and follow you around the yard. They can be a great source of education for children in teaching responsibility and where food comes from.

The city of Portland as well as many of the suburbs allow backyard chickens. Tualatin has written a proposed ordinance change that would allow for a limited number of chickens in residential backyards that are over 5,000 square feet. The ordinance would prohibit roosters. It specifies distance from homes, distance from property lines as well as size of coops and runs and fenced yards. It addresses keeping coops clean and secure from predators and vermin.

Our group is currently working on developing 'grass roots' support for backyard chickens. We are gathering signatures in



support of backyard chickens, as well as talking with the city council about adopting the change that has already been written in the near future. If you see the benefit of our cause, whether or not you ever plan to have backyard chickens, please sign a petition or email me letting your voice be heard. A work session for the city council is scheduled for Monday, December 10 at 5:00 where the backyard chicken proposed ordinance change will be discussed. There will not be public comment at this meeting.

The change in the city ordinance would show that Tualatin is a city that is concerned about sustainable living. For those of us who garden and believe that bringing what you grow from garden to table is better for our families, adopting this backyard chicken ordinance would be another addition to healthier living and sustainability for our homes and our community. And we could finally say, "We know why the chicken crossed the road – to get into our backyards!"



Laurie Jarmer has been a resident of Tualatin for over 20 years and is the team leader for Tualatin Community Garden. She can be reached at artisticmachinequilting@gmail.com.

