

## **Fresh Eggs for Your Family; Raising Chickens in Your Backyard**

Do you know where the eggs you use to fix your breakfast come from? Chris and Becky Tretina of Hartly, Del., know exactly how their scrambled eggs end up on their plates—their breakfast comes from their backyard. The couple became interested in raising their own hens in 2013, and in 2014 the novice growers purchased their first flock of chicks.

“I think what convinced us was when we started doing research about where our food comes from. We realized that having our own chickens would be easy and the benefits of having fresh eggs every day would be awesome. We know how old the eggs are and what the chickens ate,” said Becky.

The Tretinas started their adventure by purchasing 12 chicks, which were kept in a child’s swimming pool inside their home—the chicks were kept warm with a heat lamp to ensure their survival. After being moved to their chicken coop outside, it took several additional months for the chickens to start laying eggs, seven months in all.

The chickens are fed organic feed and, and as you can imagine, the eggs taste very different from those you might purchase from your local grocery store. Becky said, “There’s a huge difference between our eggs and store-bought eggs, the yolk is a lot deeper orange and they taste much richer.”

This year, the Tretinas expanded their flock to include 12 additional hens. It turns out, their family and friends enjoyed the fresh eggs so much, there weren’t enough eggs left for their own meals.

For those interested in raising their own small flock of chickens, the two have some simple advice. “It just depends on how much space you have in your backyard. There are a lot of great resources online. You can have a few chickens if you have a tiny space, or several dozen if you’re out in the country like we are. Pretty much anyone can do this,” said Chris. In Delaware, chickens must also be registered with the Department of Agriculture.

Chris and Becky check the coop for eggs every day and top off the chicken's food and water every two or three days. Their coop is large, about 200 square feet, with a roost where the chickens perch at night, and hen boxes where the chickens lay their eggs.

They have also reinforced the coop to deter predators. "The thing is like Fort Knox. We have placed wire over the top of the cage because predatory birds will fly in and take a chicken. Chris also dug a trench around the base and has bricks under the soil line to prevent animals from digging. And then we have the chicken wire just in case a snake tries to get in.

The two agree the best part about raising backyard chickens are the fresh eggs. People have differing responses when they hear about the Kent County couple's hobby. They said, "Some people laugh, some people say that's awesome, other people want to know more and some people think we're crazy."

And with their busy hens producing 60 to 70 eggs per week, the Tretinas expect their flock to eventually grow even larger, bringing them more enjoyment and thousands of delicious eggs.