

Building a Chicken Coop

A secure, weatherproof home base for a small flock

DIFFICULTY Moderate

TYPE One-off build

TIME A weekend to a week



DIFFICULTY
Moderate



TIME
1–7 days



COST
Moderate–high



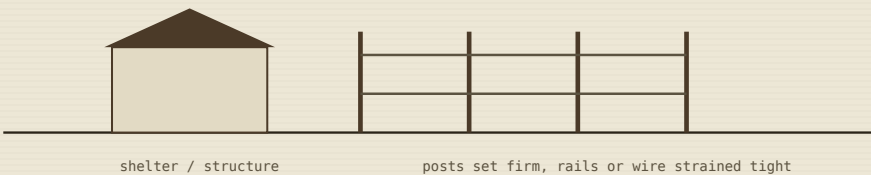
BEST SEASON
Before bringing
home birds



FREQUENCY
Built once,
maintained
ongoing

01 Predator-proof from the ground up

The single most important design factor is keeping predators out — that means secure latches, no gaps larger than a few centimetres, and ideally wire buried or turned outward at the base to stop digging predators.



02 What you'll need

- Timber or another frame material
- Weatherproof roofing
- Predator-proof wire mesh (welded, not chicken wire, which is easily torn)
- Roosting bars and nest boxes
- Secure, predator-proof latches

03 Method

1. Plan for roughly 0.3–0.4m² of coop space per bird, plus an attached or separate run.
2. Build a weatherproof frame with a sloped roof for water runoff.
3. Fit welded wire mesh over any openings — chicken wire alone doesn't stop determined predators.
4. Install roosting bars (higher than nest boxes, which birds prefer) and one nest box per 3–4 hens.
5. Bury wire mesh 20–30cm around the base, or turn it outward in an L-shape, to stop digging predators.

04 Troubleshooting

- **Predator getting in despite precautions** — check every gap and latch carefully; predators exploit surprisingly small weaknesses.
- **Poor ventilation causing damp, ammonia smell** — ensure adequate airflow, especially high vents that don't create a direct draft on roosting birds.
- **Birds not using nest boxes** — ensure nest boxes are lower and darker than roosting bars, which birds naturally prefer for sleeping.
- **Overheating in summer** — ensure good shade and ventilation; a coop that's fine in winter can become a problem in summer without airflow.

05 Timing & maintenance

BEST TIME	Build before bringing home birds, allowing time to get the design right without pressure.
DURATION	A basic coop can be built in a weekend; more elaborate designs take longer.
MAINTENANCE	Clean regularly, check latches and mesh integrity periodically, especially after storms.
SIGNS OF SUCCESS	A dry, secure, well-ventilated coop with no signs of predator attempts and birds using nest boxes and roosts as intended.

06 Tips & variations

PAIRS WELL WITH

Fencing Basics

COMMON MISTAKES

Using chicken wire instead of welded mesh, which predators can tear through

Underestimating how determined and capable predators are at finding gaps

PRO TIP

Locking the coop every single night without exception is the cheapest and most effective predator control measure available — more important than almost any other design feature.