

Eggonomics or the maths for keeping chickens

Contributed by Mrs Fiddlesticks

We've only had chickens for 3 months but whilst the figures are fresh in our minds I thought it would be helpful to detail it all, so that you can work out if it's a viable addition to your lifestyle. Our figures are based on 3 hybrid chickens kept in a wooden house and run in our back garden

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First capital costs - these are the items that last, that with careful maintenance will outlive your dear ‘girls' .Our wooden hen house and run was £300 from a local saw mill (of course you may find cheaper or may be able to make your own). We also bought a metal dustbin to house the feed in to avoid rat and mice problems, which was £15 (you may already have something suitable of course).

Next a visit to the country store and we bought a plastic feeder and waterer, both about £5 each. These won't last forever, but aren't expensive as you can see.

Shavings for bedding are £5 a bale, although there often seem to be offers on this sort of thing; of course a bale of straw from a neighbourhood farmer would be even cheaper. A bale for us lasts 6 weeks or so.

Sure there are sundries like disinfectant and I bought a dustpan and brush specifically for cleaning out the henhouse, I don't suppose these items were more than a tenner all told.

Finally and most importantly, our visit to the poultry farm where a £21 bill was split thus:

3 x Goldline hens at £3.50 = £10.50 (pure breeds will be more, and as far as I can gather had we bought more hens they would have been cheaper proportionately)

One bag of layers pellets = £4.50 (which appears to last us 6 weeks)

leaving £6 to pay for a bag of mixed grit and a bag of corn, neither of which we've had to replace yet.

The day to day costs are minimal considering we get 3 eggs a day 90% of the time, 21 eggs on a good week, for the costs I'll average it out to 20. The weekly feed costs work out thus; 75p layers pellets and mere pence for corn and grit.

Here are the totals summarised for you

Capital costs

Hen house £300.00

Dustbin £ 15.00

Total
£315.00

Mid term costs

Hens 3 @ 3.50 £10.50

Other sundries £10.00

Feeder £5.00

Waterer £5.00

Total
£30.50

Day to day costs

Shavings £5.00

Layers pellets£4.50

Grit£3.00

Corn£3.00

Total
£15.50

After all that expenditure here are the gains;

Eggs weekly average say 20, at Tesco prices 98p for 6 = £3.26

In costing out chickens don't underestimate the value of the eggs; pre-chickens I probably used 6 - 12 eggs a week max, now I probably only give away 6 a week, the rest are used in baking, suppers, breakfasts etc. Coupled with produce from the plot it's a case of eggs and veggies equals a 'free tea'! I also spend less on chocolate biscuits and the like for lunch boxes since plenty of eggs equals plenty of cakes!

Finally having worked out if you can afford chickens do spare a thought for why you are having them in your garden in the first place. Very rarely in any other project do we really work out the true cost beforehand - children are a case in point - before doing the best we can for a loved pet or addition to the family. If you see your chickens in that light with the eggs as a happy and useful bonus then the figures will always work out!