

# Why NOT to Have a Chicken for a House Pet.

## A Top 10 List

Q. Do chickens make good house pets?

A. Hmmm. This question has been a very popular one.

I ponder the possibilities every time I rescue an orphaned chick or bring home new chicks from the store or hatchery.

So, why do I ponder it so often? During our years of chicken fancying, I/we have had many chicken house pets. They remained so, however, only on a **temporary basis**. Eventually they “moved out” and now live in the chicken yard.



Isolde, Partridge Silkie Bantam hen

First suggestion, if you are considering raising chickens or simply want a source chicken information, I strongly recommend Public Broadcasting System’s (PBS) off-beat and critically-praised The Natural History of the Chicken, winner of three honors. It is very off-beat, entertaining, highly informative and well researched, in that usual PBS way.

Not to reveal the documentary’s stories, but when it aired several years ago, my husband watched it at the same time, with him in his office and me in mine. The section of the documentary about a white silkie that was kept as a house pet so moved him, that, well, he literally appeared in my office doorway saying, **“No! Absolutely Not! Don’t even think of it!”** If you’ve never met my husband, Ron Doak, let me tell you, he rarely makes bold directives of this nature. In reply, I could only chuckle. In my mind a chuckle constituted acknowledgement, but not agreement.

So, in my best David Letterman style, here are my top 10 reasons why not to have a chicken as a house pet.



**10. As already stated, my husband said No!**

Yeah, maybe this should be #1, but I give it honorable mention by placing it at #10.

**9. Chickens are social creatures. You cannot have just ONE and a small flock in the house is a bit much.**

House chickens can't assimilate and becoming part of the flock if they aren't with the flock.

Meet Petunia, our current house chick

Take little Petunia, our current *temporary house chicken*, for example. She is so highly social that she literally follows me from room to room all day. She hates to be alone and as soon as the bath tub door opens in the morning, she is out and socializing. The dog doesn't mind, but the cat is not interested. Of course, I love the added companionship and popularity of being followed from room to room.

**8. They don't learn proper chicken social skills and will grow up with social adjustment complexes.**

Marion Stamp Dawkins' studies of the behaviour of the domestic hen have led her to radical conclusions. In her latest book, Through Our Eyes Only?, she makes a careful case for the conscious chicken, marshalling evidence from years of research into the way chickens behave.

**7. They don't learn the warning signals and other important rooster vocalizations or where to go for safety when outside.**

Left, Moe, Golden Crested Polish Rooster sounds an "all-flock alert"



**6. They have to live and sleep somewhere, and eventually you will want you bathtub back.**

We have tried a variety of indoor "containment" approaches. The size, design and selection of cage depended upon the size, age, condition and number of "house chickens" we were caring for at the time.

- Various types of indoor/outdoor cages,
- Dog carriers
- Bath tub
- Cardboard boxes
- Bathroom drawer (neonatal unit with heating pad and soft towels)

After 7 years of experiment, my overall conclusion is that the easiest indoor chicken pen is our extra bathtub. Why?

1) Our bathtub has a sliding glass door which keeps them inside the tub until I'm ready for them to come out.

2) It's easy to clean - just scrub, wash droppings and food down the drain, disinfect and start again.

3) Water is close at hand for cleaning and feeding, and

1<sup>st</sup> week living in the bathtub with a heat lamp

4) Watching and visiting with the chickens living in the bathtub is entertaining during those long periods "at the library" (on the john) and all family members form a special chicken/human relationship with them that way.



BUT, *eventually* you may want to take a bath again and then you're looking for a new place for chicky to sleep. Every time, the chicken yard starts to look like a good option. Just scrub all the surfaces down with a good disinfectant or bleach and it's a tub again.



**5. They eat the dog's food, are messy eaters and take over the dog's blankets.**

House chickens, if allowed to roam, will help keep your floors free of crumbs. If you're going to keep them caged, why not keep them outside? They will also help themselves to all food they encounter, be it yours, your dog's or your cat's, and they remember how to find it all day long. Using their beaks and feet to break or shake their food into bite sized pieces, they can make quite a mess. I found chickens camping out on the dog blanket to

be easy clean up - just toss the blanket in the wash. The dog was not so happy, though.

#### **4. They try to sing along with every song, even those on the car radio.**

Well, I mean, if it's truly a pet, of course you'll take it for car rides, just like you do your dog and/or along with the dog. For chicken car seats, I refer you to the PBS documentary, The Natural History of the Chicken.

Petunia, AKA Tooner the Crooner, croons along with many things, but her most reliable sources are Andrea Bocelli and the sound of the toilet flushing! Ok, she's not very discriminating!

#### **3. Flying chickens in a house can break a lot of things.**

The stories I've heard of chickens as indoor pets, have mostly been about bantams, miniature chickens, as house pets. In the chicken world, generally the smaller the chicken, the better they fly and for longer distances. You can clip their wings (actually it's only the feathers, not really the wings themselves.) This is a technique that can be used to keep an outdoor flock restricted to designated areas.

#### **2. As many women have already experienced, roosters crowing indoors are very noisy.**

And, if given the opportunity my husband would probably counter with, "And hens cluck and chatter all day long". Enough said. No pictures, no links.

**And now for the #1 reason...**

#### **1. Chickens have no sphincter muscles.**

Chickens can not be house trained. I once heard on a science show, that the smaller the animal the more frequently they eat, and consequently, the more frequently they relieve themselves. Eventually, I tire of continually cleaning increasing larger piles of chicken poo off the floor, cages, bathtub, etc. and I'm not interested in diapering a chicken.