



# Chickens at the MRH Early Childhood Center

## The Chickens

Fourteen chicks were purchased from a hatchery in Missouri in August 2009. They represent a variety of breeds known as exotic – golden sebright, silver duckwing phoenix, black cochin and white sultan are some of the breeds represented. They are docile and bred for egg laying. They are expected to be fully mature hens in mid-winter, 2009-2010. (It is possible one of these young chicks will grow up to become a rooster and not a hen, in which case a suitable home outside of city limits will be found.)

## Costs

Purchasing the chickens cost the district \$32. Funding for their coop is covered through the Missouri Foundation for Health grant, which also supports the schools' Seed to Table program. Care for the chickens is minimal and will be provided by Early Childhood Center students, with support from High School students serving as chicken stewards. Faculty and staff will oversee their care. (No additional staff was hired to support this program.)

## Educational Benefits

Along with the garden program, the vermicomposter and many other components to the Early Childhood Center's curriculum, the chickens are the next natural step in reaching the goal of preparing students to be stewards of the earth. They will help reconnect young people with their environment, food, and animals. They will be used in learning new language. Through interactions and caring for the chickens, children will learn responsibility, self reliance, teamwork, and compassion for living things. They will learn about good nutrition, and even learn a bit about cooking eggs. High School students assisting with the program will also learn from the experience, helping fulfill stewardship credits.



## Chickens and the Community

With support from the City of Maplewood, this successful program will become a model for families in our community wishing to learn about healthy food choices and taking better care of the environment. MRH will host classes on "urban chickens," help engage people in discussions of where our food comes from, and remind citizens that it wasn't too long ago here in St. Louis that farms and families coexisted for many, many years.

## Recommended Reading

- Keeping Chickens: The Essential Guide* by Jeremy Hobson and Celia Lewis
- Living with Chickens: Everything You Need to Know to Raise Your Own Backyard Flock* by Jay Rossier, Geoff Hansen, and American Poultry Association
- Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens* by Gail Damerow
- In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* by Michael Pollan
- Real Food: What to Eat and Why* by Nina Plank

For more information about chickens at the Early Childhood Center, please contact the Maplewood Richmond Heights School District's central office at (314) 644-4400.



## More Facts About Chickens

- 1. Eggs from well-tended backyard chickens are healthier.**  
In contrast to factory farm eggs, eggs from backyard chickens have 25 percent more vitamin E, a third more vitamin A and 75 percent more beta carotene.
- 2. Eggs from backyard chickens are tastier.**  
Eggs purchased in the grocery store can be days – even weeks – old. As these eggs age, air seeps into the naturally porous eggshell, degrading not just the nutrition, but also the taste.
- 3. Chicken droppings are great for compost.**  
Chicken droppings are high in nitrogen.
- 4. Chickens provide natural insect control.**  
Chickens gobble up grubs, earwigs and other bugs.
- 5. Chicken scratching is good for the soil.**  
By aerating the soil and breaking down larger pieces of vegetation, they accelerate the decomposition process.
- 6. Chickens are a great way to meet people and start conversations.**  
And it's a great way for kids to teach adults, since they will become experts.
- 7. Chickens are fun and interesting.**  
Every chicken has a personality – and lots of it.
- 8. Backyard chickens provide lessons for children about responsibility and where food comes from.**  
Tending chickens is pleasurable and even easier than caring for a dog.

Modified from [www.examiner.com](http://www.examiner.com)