

Episode 114 show notes and advice

Episode description

For this today's episode, Sarah is joined by friend of the podcast, gardener and writer, Arthur Parkinson. Taking time away from the podcast to write his brand-new book, 'Chicken Boy: My Life with Hens' Arthur returns to share updates from his latest adventure.

In this episode, discover:

- The basics of caring for hens
- Different flocks for different plots
- Gardening ideas for spaces with hens

episode 114 advice sheet

Arthur's brand-new book, 'Chicken Boy: My Life with Hens' is out now available at all good bookstores.

Tips for gardening with hens (11:10)

Arthur explains that the first hens he came to own were classic ex-battery hens that lay brilliantly well, although he adds that this type of hen isn't as good for a smaller garden, as they can be destructive with their sharp talons.

Arthur suggests choosing robust plants and vegetation in a garden that can withstand hens. Sarah says there's a good chapter in Arthur's book which details the best plants for a hen-friendly outdoor space.

In particular, Narcissus 'Cragford' as well as varieties of robust grasses are sensible choices for planting within a large hen enclosure. This advice has meant that the Perch Hill hen enclosure now has grass and daffodils in the springtime.

Sarah advises not to take chances with certain garden plants. Sarah thought her alliums would be safe, but they were demolished!

Flight feathers (13:40)

Sarah says that the hens at Perch Hill are free to roam in a cordoned-off area of the farm, and so far, they've been lucky with little threat from foxes.

Choosing not to clip flight feathers will enable certain hens to fly and flee from foxes, which is particularly important for more explorative varieties such as 'Friesians.'

Think like a chicken (15:09)

Arthur explains that in recent years, many people have become averse to keeping animals in gardens. Arthur explains that the two can co-exist, a gorgeous garden and animals, providing you think like a chicken.

Laying foliage such as silver birch over seedlings that have been planted out can be beneficial for deterring hens, although be careful not to squash them. Also, planting a rosemary hedge on the other side of a chicken run can provide a barrier between vegetable plots and the hens.

Arthur also advises being strategic about what you plant and where you plant it. Hens adore grass, which massively impacts the taste of the eggs the hens lay, producing the most delicious flavour.

Funding the right egg boxes (15:46)

Arthur suggests going online to find smaller egg boxes for freshly laid eggs which are great for giving to friends and family. Decorating the boxes with small illustrations is also a nice touch and makes an excellent gift.

Arthur on illustration (17:49)

Arthur explains that his initial intention was to travel the UK, photographing unusual and rare breed hens, although this proved to be a lot harder than initially planned. Due to the complications arising from bird flu, a lot of bloodlines of rare breed hens have been lost.

Instead, Arthur chose to create personalised illustrations, picking out individual characteristics of the birds in pen and ink.

Chicken care and pest prevention (22:19)

Arthur's book offers all the advice he wishes he had been given before taking on his own hens. One of the key areas is watching out for foxes, Red Mites, rats, and other garden pests that may threaten hens.

Keep on top of uneaten chicken food to keep rats at bay and remember to properly reinforce where your hen's enclosure to reduce the threat of foxes.

Arthur recommends going online to find information and video tutorials on hen care. Sarah explains that it's not just about the aesthetics for gardeners, but also about the warfare of the chickens too – both must hold equal weight.

Different flocks for different people (26:11)

Sarah loves Arthur's idea of having five different flocks, which was loosely inspired by how Sarah divides her collections of dahlias and tulips.

This includes: the backyard flock, the kitchen garden flock, the flower bed flock, the flying flock, and the bijoux flock.

This method of categorisation is useful for determining which breed of hens will fit your setup and your lifestyle. Sarah says her favourites are the flying flock, which can get up into the trees and are broadly more self-sufficient, more like jungle fowl.

If you have a small garden, go for hens such as bantams which will offer excellent companionship but fewer eggs. If you have an allotment plot, the backyard flock or kitchen flock are the perfect choice, providing a steady and consistent supply of eggs.

Arthur explains that an interesting hierarchy of hens develops, so it's important to be selective about the breeds you would like to raise and the space you have. The best way to ensure harmony is to go for breeds of a similar nature.

Arthur's desert island flock (29:33)

The hens that Arthur simply couldn't live without.

- Cream legbar hens – very pretty and sweet-natured, producing gorgeous pale blue eggs too. They come in white and black, or brown-sugar-tulip orange.
- Golden laced wyandotte chicken – incredible tapestry-like feathers, they are super glamorous and come in so many different colours.
- Bantam Barbu d'Uccle – which look like little wind-up toys, prominent at Rousham House, in Oxfordshire.

Where to see Arthur's favourite rare breed hens (31:00)

Arthur says there are so many places to see these the rarest hens, these include:

- Stepney City Farm - London
- Mudchute Park And Farm, London – hear more about this fantastic city initiative by listening back to episode 75 <https://www.sarahraven.com/podcast/show-notes-ep075>
- Vauxhall City Farm, London
- Chatsworth House, Derbyshire