

# The Chicken News

by Pegi Holtz

During the early months of 2007, while Lindley and I were doing some wintertime armchair gardening, we decided to raise laying hens for fun. In addition to the “free range” eggs that they would eventually produce for us, we hoped to reduce the annoying bug population in my yard and to provide some manure for my gardens. From our initial 30 day-old chicks (who spent their first weeks in a large box in the garage) we went into the winter with 11 laying hens. Raccoons in the early months and a coyote attack in the late summer reduced the numbers.

We had decided to raise Rhode Island Reds because they are very gentle, not likely to get broody, are good layers and when they no longer produce eggs, can be made into very good coq au vin. But we also got some Plymouth Barred Rocks because they are so pretty. Our husbands helped by making a deluxe chicken coop on wheels, (affectionately called “The Palace”), so that it can be moved around. “The girls” spent the summer in or near the orchard running free most days. After the big killing spree by the coyotes, they were confined to the “patio” portion of the coop unless we were working outside and could ward off predators.

“The girls” have done an excellent job of bug control and producing manure and eggs. Unfortunately, they have taken a liking to my hens-and-chicks plants and have also scratched up all the mulch I laid down on the flower beds. Fortunately, they have also provided us with beautiful, brown eggs ranging in size from large to extra jumbo and have provided hours of happy chatter and extremely funny antics for Lindley and I to enjoy.

