

The **Omlet** guide to buying chickens

The eglu is fantastically well equipped: it has an eggport, nesting box, roosting bars and a dropping tray but there is something missing – the chickens!

It's great to choose your own chickens but to make it easier we've put together a guide covering the different breeds available, what to look for in a healthy chicken and a comprehensive list of breeders across the country.

The chickens that we supply have been carefully chosen for a variety of reasons. Miss Pepperpot and the Gingernut Ranger are great egg layers as well as being hardy and docile. As a general rule hybrid hens (like Miss Pepperpot and the Gingernut Ranger) combine the qualities of two or more pure breed hens to create a better all round chicken. Hybrid hens are justifiably popular because they lay consistent numbers of delicious eggs, are very easy to look after and make excellent pets for children.

Beside the pictures below we have given their pseudonyms as well as some other very similar suitable breeds.



Miss Pepperpot:

Bovans Nera (Rhode Island Red/Plymouth Rock cross)

Similar suitable hybrids:

Black Rock

Maran Cuivre (Rhode Island Red/Maran cross)



Gingernut Ranger:

Meadowsweet Ranger (Rhode Island Red cross)

Similar suitable hybrids:

Calder Ranger

Warren

Things to look out for in a healthy chicken

It is best to buy your chickens when it is light and the chickens are out and about. A healthy chicken will be bright, alert and active during the day. Her feathers will be glossy, and if she is already laying her comb will be pronounced and bright red. Younger birds, not yet laying eggs, have smaller combs which grow in size and colour. The legs should be smooth, and if you pick her up she should feel firm not flabby. You may see some hens with bald patches. This could be because they are in moult, an annual period where they loose quite a lot of feathers or because you are looking at the chicken at the bottom of the pecking order. If you buy a chicken like this, she will normally grow new feathers in a few weeks and look as good as new.

Know what you want

It is important to go along to the chicken supplier with a good idea of what you want. The most important questions you should consider before buying are: do you require lots of eggs, are the chickens pets for children, how much space do you have in the garden and what will the neighbours think!?

Pure Breeds, Hybrids or Bantams?

The eglu is suitable for three / four medium size chickens or four / five bantams. Bantams are like bonsai versions of big chickens; they are delightful and well suited to smaller gardens and make good pets for children. The eggs they lay are about half the size of a full size egg and they also scratch less. Nearly all bantams are pure breeds and as such command a premium price.

Pure breed chickens are often flamboyantly feathered and as some are becoming quite rare, by buying them you are helping to preserve them – which is a good thing. However, pure breeds are on the whole unable to match the egg laying capabilities of the hybrid hens and are often not as docile.

Vaccinated?

Another advantage of hybrid chickens is that they have almost always been vaccinated against a range of common diseases making them very hardy and unlikely to get ill. Because it is very expensive to vaccinate chickens, not many small breeders do this and it is rare for pure breed hens to be vaccinated.

Breed Guide, suitability for eglu and laying capability:

The list we have provided is by no means exhaustive, there are a huge number of chicken breeds and we have left out those that are primarily bred for show, but it gives a fair cross section of what is available. Some of these chickens are not suitable for the eglu but we have included them so that you know what to expect on a visit to a supplier.

Simply: Light Weight/Medium Weight – perfectly suited to the eglu
 Heavy Weight – NOT suitable for the eglu

If you would like to research the different breeds in more detail, then we would recommend popping in to your library which should hold a copy of the British Poultry Standards. Alternatively you can order a copy of Poultry for Anyone by Victoria Roberts from Omlet which has good pictures and descriptions of over 90 breeds. These books are also available online at www.omlet.co.uk/shop

How much should you pay?

The price of chickens is fairly stable; movements in world stock markets, changes in governments or the results of Saturdays match tend not to affect things too much. Having said that prices do vary from place to place. Here is a rough guide to what you should be paying for a chicken at Point of Lay (meaning the chicken will lay the first egg in 4-6 weeks, also written abbreviated as P.O.L)

Hybrid – £8 to £12
Pure breed – up to £30
Bantam – up to £20

Organic birds will attract a premium of around £2-3.

Table showing particulars of various breeds you may come across:

Breed	Type	Weight	Egg colour	Eggs Per Year
Black Rock	Hybrid	Medium	Beige	300
Maran Cuivre	Hybrid	Medium	Chestnut	200
Bovans Nera	Hybrid	Medium	Beige	300
Calder Ranger	Hybrid	Medium	Brown	300
Meadowsweet Ranger	Hybrid	Medium	Brown	300
Ancona	Pure breed	light	White	200
White Star	Hybrid	light	White	300
Sussex Star	Hybrid	medium	white	250
Andalusian	Pure breed	light	White	200
Aruraucana	Pure breed	light	Greeny blue	150
Australorp	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Barnevelder	Pure breed	heavy	Brown	180
Brahma	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	150
Campine	Pure breed	light	White	200
Cochin	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	100
Dorking	Pure breed	heavy	White	190
Faverolles	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Fayoumi	Pure breed	light	Beige	250
Friesian	Pure breed	light	White	230
Frizzle	Pure breed	Heavy	Beige	175
Hamburg	Pure breed	Light	White	200
Indian Game	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	100
Leghorn	Pure breed	light	White	240
Marans	Pure breed	heavy	Chestnut	200
Minorca	Pure breed	light	White	200
Old English Game	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	200
Orpington	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Plymouth Rock	Pure breed	medium	Beige	200
Poland	Pure breed	light	White	200
Derbyshire Redcap	Pure breed	light	Beige	200
Rhode Island Red	Pure breed	heavy	Brown	260
Scots Dumpy	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	180
Scots Grey	Pure breed	light	Beige	200
Silkie	Pure breed	light	Beige	150
Sussex	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	260
Welssummer	Pure breed	heavy	Reddish brown	200
Wyandotte	Pure breed	heavy	Beige	200
Pekin	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Barbu D'Ucle	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Rosecomb	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Sebright	Bantam	light	Beige	<125
Isa Brown	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300
Warren	Hybrid	medium	Beige	300