



# The Summer Cluckletter

A Seasonal Guide for Our Feathered Friends



## Keeping Your Flock Safe: A Guide to Predator-Proofing Your Chicken Coop

Hello fellow chicken enthusiasts!

The joy of raising chickens comes with the responsibility of keeping them safe from the many predators that would love an easy meal. Here in Stratford, we know firsthand that raccoons, foxes, hawks, and even neighborhood dogs can pose a threat to our beloved flocks. This newsletter aims to equip you with practical strategies and resources to build a fortress for your feathered friends and offer guidance for the difficult situation of a predator attack.

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### Building Fort Knox for Your Chickens:

A well-built and maintained coop is your first line of defense. Here are key areas to focus on:

- **Secure Fencing:**
  - **Digging Prevention:** Predators like foxes and raccoons are persistent diggers. Extend your coop fencing at least 12 inches below ground level, either burying it vertically or creating an "apron" that extends outwards horizontally by 12-18 inches. Hardware cloth (1/2" x 1/2" mesh) is much more effective than chicken wire for deterring digging and smaller predators.
  - **Height Matters:** Ensure your fencing is at least 4-6 feet high to deter jumping predators. Consider netting over the top of your run for aerial protection, especially if you've had issues with hawks.
  - **Strong Materials:** Use sturdy materials for your fence posts and ensure the mesh is securely attached. Weak points are easy targets.
- **The Coop Structure:**
  - **Solid Walls and Roof:** Ensure your coop has solid walls (wood, metal) and a secure roof to prevent entry from climbing or jumping predators. Check for any gaps or holes regularly.
  - **Secure Doors and Windows:** Doors should have robust latches that predators cannot easily manipulate. Consider double latches for extra security. Windows should be covered with securely attached hardware cloth.
- **Nightly Lock-Up:** Make it a routine to lock your chickens securely in their coop every night. This is the most vulnerable time for them.
- **Cleanliness:** Regularly clean your coop and run to minimize odors that might attract predators.

### Proactive Measures and Deterrents:

Beyond the physical structure, consider these additional strategies:

- **Motion-Activated Lights and Sprinklers:** These can startle nocturnal predators and deter them from approaching.
- **Guard Animals:** Dogs, cats, or even guinea fowl can provide an extra layer of protection, though careful introduction and training are essential.
- **Remove Attractants:** Securely store feed in metal containers and clean up any spilled feed.

- **Regular Inspections:** Routinely check your coop and run for any signs of damage or potential weaknesses.

### Valuable Resources:

Here are some resources that can provide further information and guidance on predator-proofing your coop:

- **Local Extension Offices:** Your county extension office (Rutgers Cooperative Extension in New Jersey) can offer region-specific advice on common predators and effective deterrents. You can find their contact information online.
- **Online Forums and Communities:** Websites like Backyard Chickens (<https://www.backyardchickens.com/>) have active forums where experienced chicken keepers share their knowledge and solutions.
- **Poultry Supply Stores:** Local feed and poultry supply stores often have knowledgeable staff who can recommend predator-resistant materials and strategies.

### When Tragedy Strikes: Dealing with Predator Attacks:

Despite our best efforts, sometimes predators still manage to breach our defenses. It's a heartbreaking experience. Here's what to do if you discover a predator attack:

1. **Secure the Remaining Flock:** Immediately ensure any surviving chickens are safe and secure within the coop. Check them for injuries.
2. **Identify the Predator (if possible):** Look for tracks, droppings, or any other clues that might indicate what type of predator was involved. This information can help you strengthen your defenses against future attacks.
3. **Assess the Damage:** Note how the predator gained access to help you identify and fix vulnerabilities in your coop and run.
4. **Care for Injured Birds:** If you have injured chickens, provide immediate care. Separate them from the healthy flock and offer a safe, comfortable space to recover. Consult online resources or a veterinarian experienced with poultry for guidance on treating injuries.
5. **Dispose of Deceased Birds Properly:** Follow local regulations for disposing of dead animals. This usually involves burying them deeply or composting them appropriately to prevent the spread of disease.
6. **Strengthen Your Defenses:** Now is the time to reinforce your coop and run based on how the predator gained access. This might involve adding more secure latches, burying the fence deeper, or adding overhead netting.
7. **Consider Trapping (with caution):** If you can identify the specific predator and it poses an ongoing threat, you might consider trapping and relocating it. However, be aware of local regulations regarding trapping and handling wildlife. Contact your local animal control or wildlife authorities for guidance.
8. **Allow Yourself to Grieve:** Losing chickens can be upsetting. Allow yourself time to process the loss.

### Let's work together to keep our flocks safe and thriving!

Share your own predator-proofing tips and experiences in our local Stratford chicken keepers' group!

Sincerely,

Your Fellow Chicken Enthusiast Lynn

