



Guest livestock at school allotments

A quick guide to animal husbandry for schools





Why are farm animals great for young people?

Introducing animals to a school allotment certainly adds enormous educational value for teaching young people about animals that help to produce our food. Having animals that young people can physically see, hear and touch can provide a special opportunity for young people to connect with animals and to become more mindful and respectful towards them. We do live in a world where young people, through no fault of their own, have little understanding of how animals help to produce food for humans.

The Papillon Project, as an educational charity, is not an expert in animal husbandry and we therefore recommend that schools do their own research about livestock beyond this introductory article. However, we are only too happy to share our wide experiences of what works in schools and what doesn't.





What animals are suitable for school allotments?

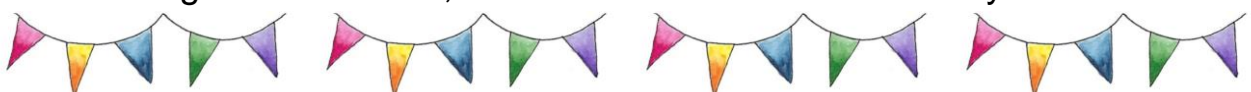
Small livestock

Chickens are an ideal animal to have a school allotment. Other than cockerels, female chickens tend to be gentle and non-aggressive (and less noisy!). Chickens can also be picked up by young people (if they can be caught!) and, if held correctly and respectfully, are fantastic animals for young people to experience holding. The fact that chickens lay eggs often blows young people's minds and definitely get them thinking and asking questions too! Allowing young people to see how chickens graze and scratch the land is all part of the experience!



If eggs can be checked for salmonella professionally, there's no reason why schools can't use eggs for cooking lesson or also sell them to raise funds. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) allows people to keep up to 50 chickens before you legally need to register them with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). With laying eggs, it's important for young people to understand that chickens tend not to lay eggs if they are stressed or unhappy and to also understand that during the colder months, they tend to have a break from laying eggs too! Chicken manure, and soiled bedding, is great for the compost heap, but not too much as its strong stuff!

However, looking after chickens certainly takes some thought and planning not only for the wellbeing of the animals, but also for the health and safety of humans too!





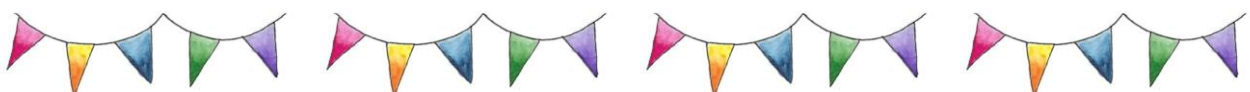
However, at the same time, it's important to give young people a good experience of basic animal husbandry and allow them to experience the inevitable challenges that come from this. It's all about a balance and schools that feel that are managing their own school allotment well should only then consider taking on keeping chickens as they will certainly become an addition of the addition!

Creating a sound chicken coop is a really great project for young people and most can be created from upcycled materials especially when it comes to creating a chicken house. However, chicken wire and fencing can be expensive when creating a run for the chickens to graze in and enjoy some freedom!



If a school decides to introduce chickens, some careful considerations need to be taken such as:

- Compulsory washing of hands for all who work with chickens
- What is to be done with the eggs that the chickens produce?
- Who will look after chickens at weekends and during school holidays?
- What do with a chicken when it dies?
- Attracting unwanted visitors (rodents).



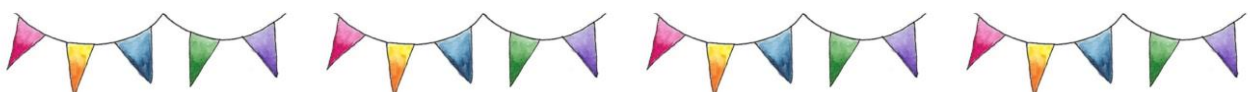


Carefully management is paramount when it comes to keeping chickens and this is especially true when it comes to attracting vermin. Keeping chickens will inevitably lead to rodents moving in to enjoy the chickens' feed and water. This can always be managed and is hard to totally prevent, but, if not managed well, it can lead to bigger problems and become a health and safety problem. The Papillon Project strongly recommends that schools look to have chickens as '**guest livestock**' with idea being that chickens are a temporary addition, for a set window of time (using spring or summer), with the view that they should be returned to whomever they were borrowed from (e.g., farmer or another member of a schools' local community). The idea being is that if chickens are taking off and away from their school-based chicken coop, and not kept permanently, then the chances of attracting vermin is reduced. It also gives the land a chance to have a break too!

Bigger livestock

Just like with chickens, the novelty of have other farm yard animals at school, is extremely exciting for young people. The bigger the animal are the more management and thought will need to go into caring for bigger livestock such as pigs, goats and cows. In many cases, schools simply don't have the time nor expertise to look after bigger animals which are also much more complicated and challenging than smaller livestock. This is why The Papillon Project highly recommends schools connecting with local farmers to invite them to bring farm yard animals into school as part of one off 'impact day'. There are also extremely strict rules when it comes to moving large livestock and it is a legal duty to inform DEFRA when large livestock are being moved and you must have a 'holding number' to keep large livestock. This is why it's much easier work with farmers on this as they have the experience and knowledge of how to manage this kind of livestock and what do if there are any problems.

However, bringing larger livestock into schools, with the support of farmers, is an amazing thing to do and, for many young people, an experience that they will never forget! It's an opportunity for young people to ask questions about larger animals and understand the 'big picture', and the reality, of where a great deal of our food comes from. Inviting farmers themselves to answer these questions helps young people to form their own opinion of farm animals and can spark debates about eating local food, animal wellbeing and even vegetarianism too.





‘Guest livestock impact day’ at City Academy Norwich (2022)



‘Guest livestock impact week’ at Reepham High School & College (2018)

