

## RANDOM SAMPLES

# CITY CHICKENS AT HOME IN SOUTH TOLEDO

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Like many moms this Mother's Day, Janice Sandys can expect her girls to make her breakfast on Sunday. The South Toledo woman even knows what it will be: eggs. Again.

That's OK. Her girls are chickens, so they have an excuse.

The "girls," as Jan calls them, are Oreo and Hydrox, two black-and-white speckled hens who cluck and strut around her narrow backyard like they own the place. With their heads bobbing - always bobbing - they poke around blades of grass as a twosome, looking for any hidden morsel that might taste good.

"To them the backyard is one big salad bar," Jan says, sprinkling some cracked corn on the lawn for them as a treat. "The bugs and the worms are all the little croutons."



These city chickens have become full-fledged members of the family since joining Jan, her husband, David, and their beagle, Mo, in this neighborhood four years ago. It happened unexpectedly during a visit to a hosta farm.

"The young girl said, 'Is that all for you?' and my husband foolishly said, 'Unless you have chickens.'"

It was a joke, but not to Jan. To her, the fluffy, friendly-looking fowl hearkened back to her girlhood, when she got a duck named Waddles for Easter and dressed it up in doll clothes.

### VIDEO

[See Jan Sandys and her chickens](#)

So what if they didn't have a huge swath of land? So what if they had to use a dog kennel as a makeshift coop in the garage or backyard until Dave, their primary caretaker, built a better one? So what if they didn't know the rules about owning a chicken in Toledo?

That last one, actually, could have been a big deal. Different communities have different laws; some don't allow chickens or have specific requirements. Fortunately, Toledo regulations don't cry foul at the possession of chickens as long as conditions are sanitary.

And so, with her three boys grown, Jan became a mom once again. More Americans are joining her all the time. The Website BackyardChickens.com, based out of the Bay Area in California, has 30,000 members and is adding 100 more every day. It offers coop designs, forums for enthusiasts, and more.

For the Sandys, the point isn't just to have another pet. They've had plenty of those over the years. Oreo and Hydrox - Jan still can't tell which is which - go beyond that. They tap into a desire to know what goes into our food and to keep it local. You can't get more local than your backyard.

More importantly, they serve as a daily reminder of where our food comes from, and it's not a box at the store. Just as technology has in some ways disconnected us from each other by making face-to-face contact obsolete, so has the modern food chain. Urban chickens are one way to reconnect with nature and bring the circle of life back into the city.

This is not to say that Jan ever intends to eat her quiet cluckers. She loves them too much. But she revels in the fact that she babies them with an all-organic diet and in return they give her 14 eggs a week sometimes, beautiful, brown eggs that burst with flavor and make a special treat for the neighbors. They're proof that a good life leads to good eggs and perhaps a metaphor for something greater.

Oh, and there's one more reason Jan and Dave love having them. It's obvious from the moment you watch these bird-brained, crazy-legged creatures hilariously sprinting across the yard as Jan sprinkles some food and beckons "Chick! Chick! Chick! Chick!"

Playing with your food has never seemed so much fun.

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