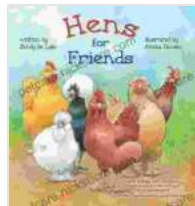


Hens For Friends: A Conversation with Irina Szmelskyj



Hens for Friends by Irina Szmelskyj

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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In the heart of urban landscapes, where towering buildings and bustling streets dominate, there are those who find solace and joy in the companionship of feathered friends. Irina Szmelskyj, founder of Hens For Friends, is one such individual. Her passion for backyard chickens has led

her on a mission to promote the benefits of urban chicken keeping, bringing these creatures into the lives of city dwellers and fostering a sense of community and connection.

The Joy of Chickens

For Irina, the joy of chickens lies in their ability to bring happiness and purpose to people's lives. "Chickens are incredibly social and affectionate creatures," she explains. "They love to interact with humans and can provide companionship and emotional support. Just watching their antics and listening to their gentle clucks can be incredibly therapeutic."

Beyond their companionship, chickens also offer a sense of purpose and responsibility. "Caring for chickens requires daily attention and routine," Irina says. "This can be a great way for people to feel connected to nature and to learn about the importance of animal welfare. It's also a wonderful opportunity for children to learn about where food comes from and to develop empathy for living beings."

The Benefits of Urban Chicken Keeping

While the idea of keeping chickens in the city may seem unconventional, Irina believes it offers numerous benefits for both individuals and communities.

- **Fresh, nutritious eggs:** Backyard chickens provide a steady supply of fresh, nutritious eggs that are free of antibiotics and hormones. "There's nothing quite like the taste of a freshly laid egg," Irina says. "It's a healthy and sustainable way to meet your family's egg needs."
- **Food security:** In times of crisis or emergency, backyard chickens can provide a source of food security. "Chickens can lay eggs for several

years, so they can be a valuable asset in the event of supply chain disruptions," Irina explains.

- **Pest control:** Chickens are natural predators of insects and rodents. "They love to scratch and forage in the dirt, which can help to keep your yard free of pests," Irina says. "They can also be trained to eat slugs and snails, which can be a nuisance in urban gardens."
- **Natural fertilizer:** Chicken manure is a rich source of nitrogen and phosphorus, making it a valuable fertilizer for gardens. "Chickens can help you to reduce your reliance on chemical fertilizers and create a more sustainable landscape," Irina explains.
- **Community building:** Urban chicken keeping can be a great way to connect with your neighbors and build a sense of community. "Sharing eggs, swapping stories, and working together to care for chickens can create strong bonds between people," Irina says. "It's a way to bring people together in a shared experience."

The Challenges of Urban Chicken Keeping

While urban chicken keeping offers many benefits, it's important to be aware of the challenges as well. Irina acknowledges that there are certain obstacles that city dwellers may encounter.

- **Space constraints:** Chickens require a certain amount of space to roam and forage. In urban areas, this can be a challenge. "It's important to carefully consider the size of your yard or balcony before getting chickens," Irina says. "You'll need to provide them with enough space to move around comfortably and access fresh air and sunlight."
- **Noise:** Chickens can be noisy, especially in the morning and evening. "This is something to keep in mind if you live in a densely populated

area," Irina says. "You may need to take steps to mitigate the noise, such as building a soundproof coop or using noise-dampening materials."

- **Predators:** Chickens are prey animals, so it's important to protect them from predators such as dogs, cats, and raccoons. "This can be a challenge in urban areas, where there are often more predators around," Irina says. "You'll need to provide your chickens with a secure coop and run and take precautions to keep them safe from harm."
- **Regulations:** In some urban areas, there are regulations against keeping chickens. "It's essential to check with your local authorities before getting chickens," Irina advises. "Make sure that it's legal to keep chickens in your area and that you comply with any regulations regarding coop size, noise levels, and waste disposal."

Getting Started with Urban Chicken Keeping

If you're considering getting chickens in the city, Irina recommends starting small. "Begin with a few hens," she advises. "This will give you the opportunity to learn about their care and needs before expanding your flock. It's also important to do your research and prepare your yard or balcony before bringing chickens home."

Irina shares some tips for getting started:

- **Choose the right breed:** There are many different breeds of chickens, each with its own unique characteristics. Some breeds are better suited for urban environments than others. "Consider breeds that are known for being quiet, friendly, and productive," Irina says. "Avoid breeds that are known for being noisy or aggressive."

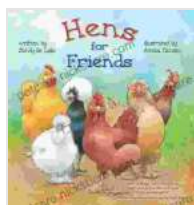
- **Build a secure coop:** Your coop should be large enough to accommodate your chickens comfortably and protect them from predators. "Use strong materials and make sure that the coop is well-ventilated and has a sturdy roof," Irina advises. "You may also want to consider adding a run so that your chickens can access fresh air and sunlight."
- **Provide plenty of food and water:** Chickens need a balanced diet that includes scratch, layer feed, and fresh greens. "Make sure that your chickens have access to fresh water at all times," Irina says. "You can use a waterer or a simple bowl."
- **Keep your chickens healthy:** Chickens are susceptible to certain diseases and parasites. "It's important to vaccinate your chickens and to keep their coop clean to prevent illness," Irina says. "Regular veterinary checkups are also recommended."

The Rewards of Urban Chicken Keeping

Despite the challenges, Irina believes that the rewards of urban chicken keeping far outweigh the difficulties.

- **Fresh, healthy eggs:** There's nothing quite like the taste of a freshly laid egg from your own backyard. "Eggs from backyard chickens are not only delicious, but they're also more nutritious than store-bought eggs," Irina says. "They're higher in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants."
- **Increased food security:** In times of crisis or emergency, backyard chickens can provide a valuable source of food. "Chickens can lay eggs for several years, so they can be a reliable source of protein and nutrition," Irina explains.

- **Reduced environmental impact:** Backyard chickens can help you to reduce your environmental impact. "Chickens are natural recy



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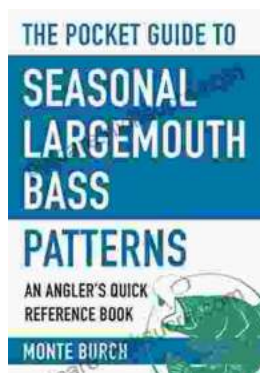
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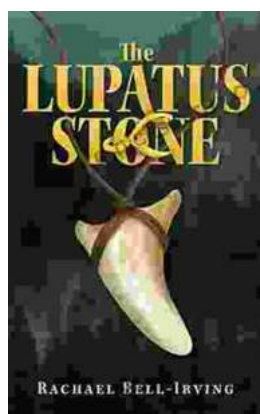
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