

Hannah Lawrence

23 Brake Close, Kingswood, Bristol, BS15 9TW

Tel: 07765 394273

Hannahlawrence07@hotmail.co.uk

17/02/2018

The Little Urban Backyard

A 1200 – word article

By

Hannah Lawrence

Before I started keeping hens, I always associated chickens as farmyard animals, not garden pets, especially not in a little urban backyard like mine. However, upon realising this was a growing hobby for may, big or small garden, I was hooked and the rest as they say, is history...

A complete novice, I started with two hybrid hens and despite reading books and taking advise from the poultry farm I purchased the hens from, I kind of leant as I went along, which is probably the case with most hobbies. Over seven years since Roxie (one) and Ginger (two) came into my life and made it a more interesting, amusing and pleasurable one, I can now say I am a hen-pro handing out tips and help to new chicken keepers like I was back in 2010, I have brought new breeds into my flock and extended it to four hens, and more recently I have rescued what you might call ‘homeless hens,’ this being the latest challenge and joy (hopefully!) in my hen keeping venture.

I have had a few Roxie and Gingers over the years, Busby and Fergie were added to my feathered group in 2015, two pekin bantams, giving me a flock of four feathered friends. Having two hens was great but I had always wanted to extend my chickens collection, but only when I felt I had the experience of my first hybrids would I expend my already happy hen hobby, so, with five years of knowledge behind me I was now enjoying having double the hens in my little urban backyard and double the eggs in my kitchen!

Being a chicken keeper is a unique and special interest however many feathered friends you have, which breads, or whether they have come from a poultry farm or a charity organisation. As with any rescue or adopted animal, taking on a ‘homeless hen’ is also special, and very

rewarding. I had always liked the idea giving a home to an abandoned hen, and in 2017, quite unexpected in many ways, I did so, on a rainy day at my local poultry farm.

JC Chickens the where I buy all my supplies for my hens in Bitton, Bristol. It's a friendly helpful place, so much so that the owners had helped an elderly couple who couldn't cope with their flock any more, by taking the last hen from them who the couple had struggled to find a new home for as she was an older bird. She had been given a lovely coop and pen at JC Chickens and was being very well looked after, but this beautiful Silver Sussex was lonely and in need of a permanent home, so, only going to the farm to buy some straw and feed, I brought home 'Lucky' to add to my flock.

The advice is not to add just one hen to an existing flock, however, as Lucky was older and more able to defend herself, it was likely she would fit in, and after a day or so of establishing a new pecking order with Lucky more than holding her own, the homeless hen was homeless no more. I was now the proud owner of five feathered friends.

Sadly a few weeks later, my old ginger hen sadly passed away, I had lost one of my girls and I was back down to four hens, however, Ginger's passing had left a space in my coop, perhaps she knew there was another little hen in need...

As if things are meant to be, another visit to Bitton farm and little Silver was spotted all alone. The owners of the farm had kindly taken her back after the people who bought her from them gave up on her. Poor Silver hadn't had come from such a good a home as Lucky, she seemed weak, timid and a little sad as I brought her home desperate to give her a chance in life and a loving home. However, little Silver proved to be harder work than Lucky, but I was determined to help her. She was unsteady on her feet as she slowly explored her new surroundings, and she was quickly found by the others despite me leaving her in the coop and

run to settle in. To be fair to my other girls, they didn't ambush Silver as much as I expected, there was pecking of course and the odd fight here and there, but because the newbie was timid and a little on the weak side, it made everything seem much worse. After a day or so I feared the worse as Silver sat alone, I gave her plenty of TLC but I was concerned her for her health as well as being able to settle into my existing group of girls. Day three brought something special and a turnaround; Silver scratched the ground for the first time in search of bugs – a result! Her legs seemed weak when she arrived preventing her from doing this, but my heart melted as she made a happy cooing noise and slowly but surely moved her craws through the soil then pecked at the soil beneath her, it was just the start of Silver's revival.

On antibiotics for a chesty cough, Silver slowly settled in. The other hens began to accept her, the day she scratched the ground in search of a tasty treat was a milestone and one that warmed my heart, she was getting stronger everyday and enjoyed her food especially mealworms, grapes and corn. As weeks past it was like Silver had lived in my back garden for years, pretty much established (she still had the odd peck from Lucky to let her know she wasn't quite top hen yet!) the day I had hoped for arrived when Silver laid her first egg for me. It was a landmark moment for little Silver and an poignant one for me – my timid weak hen had come full circle, a bit of TLC and proper attention for her well being, had made Silver a stronger happier egg-laying hen!

The colder weather was hard going for my little backyard flock, but with spring just around the corner and hopefully warmer weather ahead, this should be just the beginning for my rescue hen Lucky and Silver and their new home, along side my established girls Roxie (Red Rock) and my two Pekin Bantams; Fergie, and my oldest feathered friend Busby. Even little urban backyards can become a hen haven, the adventures of Lucky, Silver and friends have only just begun...