



Mimi Martinson makes her way out of the chicken coop after gathering eggs.

PHOTO BY WILL SMITH

Backyard Birding

Martinsons raise chickens at home

BY BECKY HATHCOCK

Raising, keeping and appreciating chickens in an urban environment is one of the hottest trends sweeping the nation.

For local chicken owners Mimi and Allen Martinson who live just outside the Madison City limits a brood of chickens started as a fun project for their two children last fall.

"Backyard Birding is a big thing right now, especially out west. They have bird tours instead of garden tours," said Martinson of how seeing the newest trend coincided with his own childhood memories recently prompted him to begin raising chickens of his own.

For the couple who both work in

the local family owned garden center business Gardenworks, they thought building coops and raising unique looking chickens for the eggs would be a great lesson in responsibility for their children as well as a good old-fashioned fun family project.

Each morning one kid has duty to water and feed the chickens," he said.

Other than providing shelter and food and water, the chickens are relatively easy to manage, he added.

"Mimi and I built the pens together last fall out of wood that came from trees on the property," he said.

Other materials included chicken wire and a covering for the roof, but otherwise was a relatively sim-

ple construction project, he said.

The coop, which they have dubbed "The Chicken Palace," measures 60 feet in length with four runs that each extend outward 20 feet.

"We wanted to give them a covered place to get out of weather as well as give them an open place to fly," Mimi said of her larger-than-usual coop.

"Many people are going with ready-made coops, but we designed and drew ours up before we began building and it ended up larger," she said.

After building the pens, the Martinsons went online to choose their chickens.

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The goal was simple: "We wanted the coolest-looking birds we could find," he laughs.

They ended up with several egg-laying Dominquers, Golden Seabrights (in the Bantam family), and Golden Laced Polish and white Crested Black and White Polish along with several roosters.

"We ordered an open run and ended up with more roosters," he said. "But we plan on ordering more."

Chickens can be hatched and raised from eggs, but first time chick farmers may choose to order chicks that had already been born from hatcheries the Martinsons used including mypatchicken.com and murraymcmurray.com which also provide basic info on care and raising of chickens.

It has been fun to watch the flock as they lay eggs, Martinson said.

"The Seabrites lay eggs on the

ground and take turns sitting on eggs with the doves that also roost in the pen," he said.

"We have given up on trying to name them all," he said, but two of the most outlandish roosters with elaborate crests were given the monikers LL CoolJ and Uncle Rico, he laughed.

The family has had such a good experience with the chickens that in late summer and early fall, they will be incorporating starter coops at Gardenworks, Mimi Martinson said.

Of course, if you live in the city limits, you will have to check local ordinances before building a pen and installing its clucking residents, but just in case your neighborhood doesn't allow for the birds, Gardenworks pens will also be available to the public for observation.

"It is just a fun thing to watch, something everyone can enjoy," she said.

And the bonus is the eggs, she said. "Our chickens produce about 8-10 eggs a day." □



Allen Martinson stands beside the beds that will soon hold the family's garden.

Will Smith Special to The Herald