



Like many goats, this Crook County duo enjoys an adventure. Photo by Sara Fleenor.

Consider space requirements before turning your backyard into a barnyard

From backyard chickens to miniature cows or horses, many people are intrigued by the idea of raising animals on a few acres. Providing animals with adequate space and shelter is essential, and requirements vary by species. The recommendations below can help you determine which animals might be best suited to your situation.

Miniature cows

Currently, 26 breeds of cattle are classified as minis, which means they weigh 500–700 pounds and measure below 42 inches in hip height. They eat about a third the amount of feed as full-size cattle, are less destructive, and are easier to handle. The majority are raised for pets, small-scale milk production, breeding, and showing. While they can be harvested for meat, most are not.

Mini cows are herd animals and are happier when raised in pairs or a small herd. For two minis, the minimum space requirement is 1.5–2 acres.

Mini cows also require shelter. Provided they have room to roam, an open-faced, three-sided shed or barn is adequate. Corral panels or barbed wire fencing are most effective for cattle enclosures.

Note that cattle raised in confinement require hay and supplemental feed for optimal health.

Miniature horses

Mini horses measure 34–38 inches high. They require the same level of vaccinations, dental care, hoof care, feeding, and shelter as full-size horses. The minimum amount of land for one mini horse is 1–2 acres with a 10-foot-by-10-foot stall area or a three-sided barn or shed that provides protection from the elements. Like full-size horses, they require pasture with shade, grass, and clean water.

Keep in mind that mini horses can easily overeat and become overweight or founder. The latter causes painful, abnormal hoof growth and requires intense treatment.

Poultry

As chickens grow, their housing and environmental needs change. Chicks need a brooder box to keep them warm and enough space that they don't smother, but not so big that they spread out and get cold. A large plastic storage tote, metal water tank, or even a large cardboard box are viable options for new chicks. Use of supplemental heat is advisable, but make sure to take proper safety measures to minimize fire risks.

At six weeks, chicks will need more space, 1–2 square feet per bird. When they reach maturity, adults each need 4 square feet of indoor space and 5–10 square feet of outdoor space.

Chickens need an adequate coop that provides laying space and a place to roost at night. For 10 regular-sized chickens, 30 square feet is ideal. Perch space of 8–10 inches per bird should be incorporated for healthy roosting. Sufficient space is imperative to reduce wounds and chances of aggression, bullying, and cannibalism.

Poultry also require protection from predators like foxes, raccoons, cats, dogs, and skunks. Providing a secure outdoor space by burying fencing 12 inches deep with reinforced concrete blocking on the chicken wire helps prevent digging under the fence. A secure run area also prevents wild birds from interacting with the flock and spreading pathogens, like the virus that causes avian influenza. Always make sure to lock the chickens in at night.

Swine

Raising swine is a great option if you have the space, facilities, and a plentiful water source. While some breeds are inherently smaller or slower growing, no species of pig is classified as teacup, mini, or micro. Even that cute little potbellied pig will eventually grow to be around 150 pounds.

Each piglet needs around 5 square feet of space, while each market-ready pig needs approximately 12–15 square feet.

A covered shelter is necessary to keep pigs cool in warm temperatures and warm when it gets cold.

Placing straw bedding inside the shelter allows the pigs to burrow in for warmth and provides a level of freshness. Proper ventilation helps reduce odor and prevent respiratory illness. Unlimited water is essential for optimum health and performance.

Certain pig breeds are more suitable for yard pets, while others are grazers. Grazing pigs require a minimum of a half-acre per pig. Pigs without enough space can become aggressive and destructive.

For more information on raising pigs, check out the B&B article “Pork or pets? Pick the perfect pig project” at <https://bit.ly/bb-raising-pigs>.

Sheep and goats

Sheep and goats need adequate room to roam, ideally a minimum of a quarter acre per animal. They also require 15–25 square feet per animal for housing. A three-sided shed that provides shade in hot weather and wind protection during cold months can be a good housing option.

Goats like an adventure, so make sure to use fencing that has small gaps and can't easily be scaled. If goats escape, their curious nature often puts them in positions that can be frustrating to a homeowner (or neighbors), such as climbing on cars, roofs, and



Like many pigs, this little rascal has a big personality. Photo by Sara Fleenor.



Goats are curious by nature, which can sometimes get them into trouble. Photo by Sara Fleenor.

porches. Goats are known for eating plants that other animals find distasteful, like weeds, but they may also consume ornamental plantings as well as rope, wire, and other items that are harmful to their health.

Sheep and goats have conflicting mineral needs. Goats need more copper in their diet, while too much copper will poison sheep. In a mixed flock, make sure to feed supplements separately or provide a supplement that is approved for sheep.

Llamas and alpacas

Llamas and alpacas have similar requirements but differ in size and temperament. Llamas are generally larger, weighing around 200–450 pounds. Alpacas are smaller, around 100–200 pounds, and have softer fleeces. Both types of camelids are herd animals and should never be kept as singles. Two animals is acceptable, but three or more is ideal to allow for more natural behaviors and instincts.

The space requirement for these animals is around 200–400 square feet per animal (no more than seven llamas or alpacas per acre). Grazing is important in the diet of both llamas and alpacas but hay should also be supplemented in smaller spaces. They need unlimited fresh water.

Fenced spaces must be sturdy and 4–5 feet tall so they cannot be jumped over. Barbed wire is not an appropriate fencing material.



Chickens require a coop space with roosting space, laying space, and a source of fresh water. Sufficient space is imperative to prevent aggressive behavior. Photo by Sara Fleenor.

For housing requirements, a barn should have 50–60 square feet per animal. Llamas and alpacas are adapted for cold climates; snow and cold are not a problem, but heat can be. Shearing these animals is necessary for managing heat stress and matting.

Rabbits

The housing and space requirements for rabbits vary based on size. As rabbits grow, they need more space.

Rabbits can be housed indoors or out with proper ventilation, clean cages, and protection from extreme temperatures. Rabbit cages, which are typically 14 inches in height, should be made with quality wire but have a solid floor. At minimum, rabbits housed outside require a three-sided shelter with a roof.

Small rabbits (less than 4 pounds) require 1.5 square feet of floor space (space available minus space taken up by food and water). Large rabbits (more than 11 pounds) require 5 square feet of floor space. It is important to provide an area for exercise; a space with platforms and tunnels can help rabbits thrive.

With any livestock, keep in mind that space requirements and temperament can vary with age, sex, and reproductive stage. Making sure space and housing facilities are adequate for your animals will help you have a rewarding experience.

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