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home to roost

A COUPLE FROM NORWAY MAKE A NEW HOME IN MAINE WHERE
THEIR GARDENS GROW AND THEIR CHICKENS ROAM.



With seating indoors and out, Ingunn and Torggrim Joergensen's greenhouse is framed by raised beds growing a mixture of vegetables, herbs, and flowers, as well as by the row of rhododendrons and azaleas that screen the property from neighbors.

The chicken coop nests behind its own garden filled with sedum, Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), hydrangeas in containers, and *Heuchera* 'Caramel'. Recently, Ingunn hatched the idea to train clematis up the chicken wire.



INSET Torgrim, Ingunn, and their two giant schnauzers, Frida and Oscar who serve as herd dogs for the flock, spend some family time beside the chicken coop.

Ingunn and Torgrim Joergensen didn't plan to stay in the United States, but the two Norwegians found themselves seduced by the charms of Kennebunkport, Maine. "We were only planning to be here a couple of years," Ingunn says, "but we kept extending." After five years, the couple decided to sell their home in Norway and remain in the seacoast town with the network of friends they'd made and surrounded by scenery that inspired Ingunn's oil paintings. All they

needed to make life complete was the perfect homesite. When they found a 4-acre property within walking distance to town but secluded by mature trees and underlayered with rhododendrons and azaleas, they were intrigued. A shed for housing chickens sealed the deal.

Painted white and looking weary, the shed was in need of a facelift. Nonetheless, Ingunn fell in love with its mossy roof. She and Torgrim left the roof untouched but painted the exterior walls charcoal, fitted the interior



with roosts, and built an enclosure where the chickens can roam safely when the couple are not home. Turning to the same subdued, earthy palette she dips into when painting, Ingunn ensconced the building in viburnums, hellebores, heucheras, hydrangeas, and clematis.

Ingunn often takes breaks from her painting studio to spend time outside as the chicks scratch around the property “talking” among themselves. She grows vegetables and greens in raised beds, and the chickens

BELOW A Barred Rock pullet takes full advantage of the warm roost furnished by a vintage metal chair. **BOTTOM** With six hens laying, the Joergensens average four eggs a day. “And they actually lay through the winter,” Ingunn says.



THE PECKING ORDER

Lisa Steele, author of *Gardening with Chickens* (Voyageur Press, 2016) and host of the television show *Welcome to My Farm*, can quickly reel off many reasons chickens and gardens go together. Not only will the birds furnish fertilizer for your garden—via composted coop cleanings and eggshells—but they can also be put to work loosening the soil prior to planting. “They’re much easier on the soil than a rototiller,” Steele says. Both gardens and chickens reap rewards from the closeness: Chickens eat many insects, consume excess seedlings and garden waste, and can make your gardening time a more social and relaxing experience. Here are some pointers for keeping poultry and plants in proximity:

PREVENT HENPECKED

PLANTS. Steele recommends letting chickens roam the yard, and her approach is to fence in the garden rather than vice versa. “A 4-foot fence won’t do the job,” she says. A fence should be substantial (remember, chickens can fly).

PROTECT INDIVIDUAL PLANTS.

Say you’re growing lettuce or some other delicacy that chickens love: “Throw a cage over it,” Steele says.

SUPERVISE PLAYTIME. Even if you can’t let your birds roam free throughout the day, consider supervised outings. Choose a time when you tend to be working in the garden and let the chickens out while you’re present so you can protect the flock and the garden.

MONITOR VEGETABLE

SCRAPS. Although chickens are great at recycling vegetable scraps, not everything is safe for them. Read up on plants that might poison your flock. In particular, members of the nightshade family (including tomatoes and potatoes), rhubarb leaves, and beans can cause health problems in chickens.

When in the garden, Ingunn is often accompanied by a hen or the full flock of six. Harvesting usually attracts a few birds hoping for a handout.



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-INGUNN JOERGENSEN


are one reason why: They find it more difficult to reach the plants when they're grown above ground level. When the plants are seedlings, Ingunn fences off the area with a 2-foot-tall barrier of chicken wire to keep the birds out. The Joergensens' two giant schnauzers also help keep the birds from mischief, as well as from harm.

The garden beds reward Ingunn's precautions with a bounty of organically grown produce. The growing season starts with spinach and lettuce and moves into multiple varieties of kale and tomatoes, carrots, beets, and summer squash. Ingunn also grows herbs, with an emphasis on basil and parsley. Torgrim, an engineer, fitted the beds with a drip irrigation system, but Ingunn finds watering by hand to be infinitely restorative and prefers to do it herself. The garden configuration proved so efficient and productive that, Ingunn says, "We often pick our last meal of the season for a Christmas feast." Ingunn is a vegan, but Torgrim is a flexitarian, so the garden plays a major role in their menus. "I have a zillion cookbooks," Ingunn says, "but really, I see what's available and simply cook that for dinner."

The chickens also prompted Ingunn to search for a greenhouse so she could comfortably spend time outdoors in their midst. Two years ago, she stumbled upon a nearby greenhouse for sale by the owner. The freestanding structure was a bargain but setting it up beautifully proved more expensive—and she wanted to do it right. In honor of Ingunn's father and grandfather, who worked on a railroad, railroad ties form the foundation. For the floor, a local stonemason laid repurposed brick in a herringbone pattern. Then came the delight of filling



1 The Joergensens count basil as one of the most important herbs in their garden. **2** Eggplant thrives and produces a generous crop in the sunny raised vegetable beds. "I add it to my pasta sauces," Ingunn says. **3** Beautiful lacinato kale looks like an ornamental and serves as a salad ingredient. **4** Ingunn grows yellow cherry tomatoes to snack on while she works in the garden. Plenty of little tomatoes are left to add to batches of tomato sauce the couple will enjoy in winter.



Ingunn purchased a 'Marquis' white wine grape to climb the greenhouse wall and provide shade. It began working its magic quickly to make midsummer greenhouse moments more lush and shaded.


the greenhouse with plants. Ingunn installed wine grapes to climb the back wall and provide natural shade, and she nestled immense pots of olives, figs, and lemon around a lounging chair.

Every spring she invests in several potted hydrangeas to fill antique wicker baskets by the doors of the

greenhouse, then pops them into their permanent places in the landscape in fall.

Although they have made the property their own, Ingunn and Torgrim feel a strong sense of stewardship that has been reinforced by annual visits from the property's elderly previous owner, who came when the



azaleas and rhododendrons were in blossom to walk around with clucking chickens as accompaniment. Last year, the former owner paid her final visit, further inspiring Ingunn to preserve the ambience even while infusing the scene with her personal style. “Needless to say, I will not touch her rhododendrons,” Ingunn says. 

BELOW Ingunn’s flower arrangements are loose, lovely, and casual in style. This composition is filled with cosmos, pincushion flower (*Scabiosa*), and tall sedum.

