

or simply use an old crate or box. Size the boxes according to the breed, but for typical Leghorns, a 12- x 12- x 9-inch will do. The low ceiling provides the cozy cave that hens desire, and it prevents the birds from standing in the nest, fouling it and scratching through the bedding. Bed the boxes with about 2 inches of straw or shavings to prevent eggs from cracking when laid.

## Roosts

Birds need a high place to sleep at night, so outfit your coop with a roost or series of roosts. Think “natural” when it comes to roosting material—rounded edges are easier for birds to grip. A sturdy tree branch, an old ladder or broom handle, or a wooden dowel are all suitable materials. File smooth any rough or square edges.

Allow 1 linear foot of roost space per bird. Install roosts starting at 2 feet off the floor with at least a 12-inch vertical and horizontal separation. Due to chicken droppings, do not place roosts over each other or directly over the feed area.

## Predator Protection

Seal any of the coop’s unintended openings with ¼-inch hardware cloth; it allows ventilation while excluding the smallest mice. Build the coop to sit off the ground by at least 1 foot; this way, rodents, skunks, raccoons or opossums don’t feel safe to nest in the space below. Rest the coop on concrete or pressure-treated wood blocks.

## Fencing

Mesh—woven wire or electric netting, 5 feet high—makes the best poultry fence. Bury 6-foot wire mesh fencing 6 to 12 inches below the ground, bent outward to thwart digging predators. Avoid standard chicken wire. It’s flimsy and won’t hold up against predators or weather. **FL**

