

# **Recycling Facilities, But With Feathers: Why backyard chickens were the perfect addition to my urban farm**

I'm going to be honest, the inspiration for this piece came to me while I was rummaging through my refrigerator. I grabbed a handful of strawberries, and an enthusiastic thought popped into my head: "Those leafy bits at the top will be a great treat for the chickens later."

Yup, I have a flock of chickens. I've kept chickens continuously since my very early 20s, other than during a brief disruption while I ran an ultimately successful, very emotional, two-year campaign to change a stupid law and legalize them in Woonsocket.

And I haven't looked back since. I cannot overstate just how great it is, from a holistic-food-growing perspective, to have chickens on my urban farm. They are natural foragers and omnivores with strong stomachs and pretty varied diets, which means a flock is an ideal complement to a garden and a compost pile/bin. They can eat a lot of the garden "waste" that we can't, and they get pretty excited to eat things like fruit and vegetable scraps (hello, strawberry greens), stale bread and even slightly soured or chunky milk. (Side note: Research before feeding kitchen scraps to chickens. Certain things, such as avocados and chocolate, are toxic to them).

Keeping chickens has helped me to put regenerative, truly sustainable agricultural principles into practice on my own urban farm. They've helped me to think holistically, to imagine this little ecosystem as a series of closed, intersecting loops; ie, one where garden and food "waste" feeds chickens that make eggs, which feed my family, and manure, which gets composted and improves soil fertility, which produces a better garden. The more of these loops we can close, the more sustainable our urban farms can become. And in that process, we can produce more fertile soil, healthier food, a more fulfilled soul and happier chickens.