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July 22, 2009 | 4:22 pm | Josh Dehaas

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Cooped up: A woman is in hiding as she fights for Torontonians' right to keep chickens in their backyard



Fowl play: Goldie, Ayr and Sally get some free time in their owner's yard

A Toronto mom is in a cat-and-mouse game with bylaw officers who want to capture her illegally kept chickens and send them back to the farm. The accidental activist—known only as **Toronto Chicken**—is fighting to have her feathered friends legalized, saying that they are clean, quiet and environmentally friendly. Authorities disagree, saying that the chickens' droppings could be used by terrorists to make a bomb; if Toronto Chicken isn't stopped, organic egg grow-ops could sprout up in backyards from Rexdale to Riverdale. What's a chicken lover to do?

The mother of two teenage boys is not the type of person you'd expect to become a law-breaker. She tells us she bought the chickens in 2007 because she cringed at the thought of feeding her family factory-farm eggs. By keeping them in her own backyard, she can be sure that the birds are getting lots of sun and eating high-quality food. "Our chickens love prime rib," she told us. "And they're out getting vitamin D from the sun, instead of from a pill." And the droppings? Far from being used for a bomb, she uses them as a nitrogen-rich compost for growing squash, beans and corn.

Toronto Chicken may be hiding, but she's still active in underground poultry channels. [Her blog](#) aims to convince the public that backyard hens don't threaten the peace. She also posts coded instructions for her network of supporters, including such messages as "cats and chickens get along just fine" and "you don't need a rooster for hens to lay eggs."

Her fowl accomplices in all this include **Silly Sally** (whose weakness is flipping Rubbermaid containers over her head), **Ayr** (who waits beneath the picnic table for scraps to fall) and **Goldie** (identifiable by her tattoo and copper feathers). The four fugitives might not have to hide much longer; support for Toronto Chicken's politics appears to be growing among the public. Some city councillors are looking to decriminalize backyard chickens—just like Chicago, Vancouver and New York have done—and the media have reported that the city is turning a blind eye to some caged chickens living on the fringes of lawfulness up in Downsview Park. Toronto Chicken expects the city to recommend legalization of backyard chickens as early as this fall.

Will chicken peddlers win over our fair city and spread across town? "It's only a matter of time," says Toronto Chicken.