



## Raising Chicks

Baby chicks need to be kept warm at all times. You will need a red heat lamp for this, and it is very important to always provide a way for the chicks to get away from the heat source if they get too warm. The heat lamp should have a way that it can be raised and lowered easily. Raise the lamp

a few inches from the chicks each week to make the temperature cooler. Start out by placing the lamp close enough to the chicks so that they are kept at 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 Celsius) for the first week, then reduce the heat by 5 degrees each week until you reach 70 degrees. A thermometer is useful for this purpose, but you can watch the chicks' behavior and see if it is too warm or not warm enough. If the chicks are huddled together and chirping, they are not warm enough, and if they are trying to get away from the lamp, they are too warm. Once the chicks have 'feathered out' they will be able to keep themselves warm.

If you order chicks through the mail, examine the chicks at the post office to be sure they are alive. Have their brooder ready for them. Take each chick out and gently put its beak in a water/electrolyte solution. Then place it in the brooder. Cover the floor of the brooder with paper towels (for a few days) over the litter so the chicks won't eat the litter. Sprinkle chick starter on the paper towel. Using your finger, "peck" at the starter; the chicks will imitate you. Check them frequently to be sure all are eating and drinking. After the paper towels are removed, stir the litter every day; add fresh litter as necessary.

Light the brooder continuously for the first 48 hours. Then, turn the light off for ½ hour each day so the chicks will learn not to panic if in an emergency the lights go out.

An online poultry dealer is an excellent source to provide information on raising chickens, and on the different breeds available. Read through the descriptions of each breed to find just the type of birds that you want. There are chickens that lay white, brown or blue/green eggs. Size of eggs is another thing to look for.

Chicken breeds differ in personality as well. There are friendly breeds, and 'flighty' breeds. If you want your chickens to be pets, or if you have children, this will be an important factor to consider. Also, if this is your first venture into chicken keeping, you should probably consider a hardy breed. Chickens can be quite hardy, but some breeds are hardier than others. Some breeds do better in colder (or warmer) climates than others. Take all of these factors into consideration before settling on a particular breed.

Once your chickens are full grown, you may want to let them roam the yard. This works well, if you have a fenced yard. Chickens will automatically 'return to the roost' before dark, so there is no need to round them up every evening. Still, because they are so motivated by food, it is very simple to teach them to come when called. Simply use the same phrase each

time (I use 'chicky, chicky, chicky'), offer them food such as “scratch” when they arrive, and very soon, they will *a/ways* come when you call them.

At about 5 months old, your chickens will start laying eggs. A rooster is not necessary for your chickens to provide eggs. There is no difference in the cholesterol level of fresh all natural eggs from your own chickens or supermarket eggs, but eggs from chickens that you raise naturally at home will have an almost orange yolk. These eggs will be *much* tastier than the supermarket variety, and you will never want to go back to eating commercial eggs again.

## **What Do Chickens Eat and How Much?**

Exclusive of housing, feed accounts for 70 percent of the cost of keeping chickens, so it is important to learn what to feed and how much. Nutrition is an important part to raising healthy chickens. Know how much food to give them and what kind of food will help your chickens grow and produce the kind of eggs you want.

## **Using Commercial Poultry Food is One of the Best Ways to Feed a Chicken**

Foods bought at your local feed supply store are probably the best way to make sure your chickens have the best nutrition. Using the right kind at the right age is also important.

Here is an example of what to feed a chicken at what age:

- for the first 6 to 8 weeks: Chicken Ration (starter mash).
- then after 6 to 8 weeks until 20 weeks: grower or developer mash.
- the above feeds are often combined into a product called starter/grower which can be fed for up to 20 weeks.
- at 20 weeks when they start to lay eggs: laying mash either in pellets or crumbles

## **The Amount to Feed Chickens**

The amount to feed chickens depends on many factors but that does not mean feeding them has to be to overwhelming and confusing. The amount depends on size and energy needs.

- chickens eat more in cold weather than warm weather.
- hens that have range in the yard should still receive commercial feed.
- grit should be available as soon as the chicks start to feather out.
- oyster shell should always be available to give eggs a strong shell.
- laying hens eat just under two pounds of feed per hen per week.

## **How Much Water Does a Chicken Need?**

Most animals need access to water at all times and this is no different for chickens.

Simple things to remember about water and chickens:

- chickens need water at all times.

- chickens will molt (lose feathers) if they do not have water for 36 hours.
- lack of water can also cause poor laying.
- chickens drink between one to two cups of water a day.
- laying chickens drink twice as much as nonlayers.
- in warm weather chickens drink two to four times more water.

## **What Kinds of Ingredients are in Chicken Feed?**

Poultry feed includes vitamins, minerals, protein, and carbohydrates. Giving your chicken the proper diet is not only important for a chicken's health but it is also important for good egg laying. Buying commercial feed from your local feed dealer is convenient and probably the best because it has all the appropriate nutrition. Supplementing their diet with table scraps can add variety to their diet and add some fun into feeding them.

Some caveats on feeding chickens table scraps:

- Don't overdo or the resulting nutritional imbalance may cause slow growth, reduced laying and poor health.
- Don't feed raw potato peels, which chickens can't easily digest – cook potato peels or avoid them.
- Don't feed anything spoiled or rotten, which can make chickens sick
- Don't feed strong-tasting foods like onions, garlic, or fish, which can impart an unpleasant flavor to poultry meat and eggs.

Other "good" supplements:

- hay chaff
- whey left over from cheese making
- lawn/pasture grazing

## **Feeding Methods**

- Free Choice – food is always available
- Restricted Feeding – you feed at certain time(s) during the day

Free choice feeding saves time and ensures no chicken goes hungry. Restricted feeding is time consuming and can cause chickens low in the pecking order not to get enough to eat. If you choose restricted feeding, be sure to provide enough feeders so all birds can eat at the same time. With free choice, the birds can eat when they want which reduces boredom.