

## Hatching Chicken Eggs Naturally

<http://successwithpoultry.blogspot.com/2008/09/hatching-chicken-eggs-naturally.html>

There comes a point in many chicken enthusiasts' lives when they long to experience hatching and raising their own chicks. Essentially there are two choices when it comes to hatching your own chicken eggs; natural incubation under a hen or artificial incubation in an incubator.

For natural incubation you will obviously need to have some fertile eggs ready and a broody hen. Whilst fertile eggs are usually available at all times (if not from your own flock, then they can often be purchased elsewhere) the presence of a broody hen is not something you can really control. Some hens go broody only once or twice in their lifetime, others will go broody regularly. Your girl(s) will also be strongly influenced by the time of year and so the window of opportunity is again likely to be further narrowed down to the warmer weather of the spring or summer.



*Photo By Dottie Day*

Once you do have a broody she will probably benefit from a secluded nest and having food and water within easy reach. The nest is safest close to ground level to prevent any unfortunate accidents when the chicks are hatching out. A small coop or area of a coop if available can be an ideal solution as it also allows her and the chicks some safety and privacy if she is to raise them. She will need to leave the nest from time to time, but these periods will be brief, and unless

she is quite young and / or flighty, she is not likely to abandon the nest unless she has cause to (i.e. a predator attack or if she knows there are no surviving chicks left to hatch out).

The biggest benefit of hatching chicken eggs naturally (in my opinion) is that you can, if you want to, leave everything up to the hen. It can be hard to resist visiting the nest to candle the eggs or check that none have been soiled or damaged, but it is probably fair to say that even without that additional help she is likely quite capable of successfully hatching out some chicks. All being well, in around 21 days, you will be enjoying watching your broody with her brood.

### **Good luck!**

Some of the benefits of natural incubation are:

- You can leave everything up to Mother Nature - what will be will be.
- Watching a good mother hen teaching her chicks how to find food and dust bathe etc. is a joy to behold.
- Chicks hatched and raised naturally can tend to be more robust.

Some of the downsides of natural incubation are:

- You can't choose when, or even if, you will have a hen go broody.
- She will stop laying eggs whilst she is broody, and will not start laying again until her chicks are well developed (that could mean as many as four months without eggs from her).
- There is a limit to the number of chicks one hen can hatch and raise.

- Not all hens make good mothers; some can be clumsy and break the eggs they are supposed to be hatching, others will ignore their newly hatched chicks, some may even peck at and attack them (have a back-up plan for brooding the chicks yourself in case the need arises).



*Photos by Jill Capel*



*Photo By Neal Foley*

"Sometimes you don't get to choose where broody hens will nest. These chicks were born in a high-rise nesting box. My solution is the balcony. . . ."