

The Care of Baby Chicks, Ducks, & Geese

BABY CHICKS NEED: FEED, WATER, HEAT, LIGHT & SPACE.

FEED: Use a commercial chick starter for the first 8 weeks. Cover the floor with several layers of paper towels. Sprinkle the feed on top of the paper towels all around the area where the chicks will be. (Use plenty. Better to waste some than not have enough.) The chicks find the feed more easily this way at the start. Change the paper towels daily. Do this for 3 days. Then put the feed in troughs low enough so the chicks can see and reach the feed easily. Use a 2 foot feeder for each 50 chicks. Never let the chicks run out of feed. Be sure that the feed that you purchase is a brand name and has had a short shelf life. Feeds will get old and will lose many of the vital nutrients that baby chicks need.

WATER: Have a one gallon chick waterer for each 50 chicks. For the first two days, add 3 tablespoons of table sugar to each quart of water for extra energy. Use plain water after that. Dip the beak of the chick in the water before you turn it loose. Your chicks will be thirsty when you get them. A taste of water right away helps them to find more water soon. Most baby chick loss is caused because the chick doesn't start to eat or drink. Never let your chicks run out of water.

HEAT: The temperature where the chicks are should be 90 to 95 degrees for the first week. Reduce the temperature five degrees per week until you get to 70 degrees. They shouldn't need any heat after 70 degrees. Use a thermometer to measure temperature. Do not guess.

A good source of heat is a 250 watt heat bulb (red bulbs are better than white. They cause less picking.) Hang it 18 inches from the floor. The temperature directly under the bulb will be higher than 90 degrees. but the chicks will adjust themselves to the area they like. Use one bulb for each 50 chicks in cold weather. Use one bulb for each 100 chicks in warm weather.

LIGHT: If you use a heat bulb, this will also serve as the light you need. Otherwise, be sure to give your chicks light. Use a 75-watt bulb on dark days. Have a small light for night- 15 watts or similar - to keep them from piling.

SPACE: Try to provide 1/2 square foot per chick. When starting 50 chicks use a draft shield (see below) and make a circle about 5 to 8 feet across. For 100 chicks. make the circle 7 to 8 feet across.

Watch the behavior of the hatchlings. Hatchlings that are adequately warm are scattered throughout the brooding space, eating, drinking and stopping for naps. They make soft contented sounds. Chicks that are too cold, huddle together making unhappy chirps. Chicks that stand at the edge of the brooding space panting, with necks stretched out are too warm. Always design your brooder to have a cooler place for the chicks to move to.

OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

DRAFT SHIELD: Cardboard put in circle about 12 inches high around the chicks helps cut down drafts on the floor. Be sure the circle is large enough to allow chicks to get away from the heat if they want to.

LITTER: Peat moss, shavings, or ground corn cobs make great litter. If you are using shavings for litter, be sure they are kiln-dried and not fresh. This is very important. Place the litter over the floor at least 1-inch thick. Keep the litter covered for the first three days with paper towels or old bedsheets to keep the chicks from eating the litter instead of the feed. This is especially important for pheasant chicks. It is important to remove the paper towels after three days.

GRIT: Starting after the third day, also sprinkle baby chick grit on the feed every 3 days as if you were salting your food. Avoid putting out too much at any one time as the chicks may fill up on it instead of the feed.

PICKING: Baby chicks will often pick at each other if they are too hot, too crowded, without fresh air; or short of room. Occasionally, a bright light also causes them to pick, especially in game birds. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to picking. Sometimes, however, they pick for no apparent reason. To stop it, try putting in green grass clippings several times a day and darken the room. Chunks of grass sod can also be set around for the chicks to pick at. (As a last resort try cutting off about one-third of the top bill with a very sharp knife or razor blade. Cut from top to bottom, straight down. Be careful not to crush the bill by pushing too hard on the knife or razor blade.)

AFTER FOUR WEEKS

- Increase floor area to 3/4 sq. ft. per chick.
- Increase feeders to provide 2-1/2 to 3" of space per chick.
- Increase waterers to one 5 gallon fount per 100 chicks.
- Make sure grit hopper is filled with proper sized grit. Check with your feed store.
- Install roosts at back of brooder. Allow four inches per bird with roost poles six inches apart (Not necessary for waterfowl)
- Open windows in daytime. Leave only partly open at night
- Prevent water puddles around founts.
- Chicks can range outside on warm, sunny days, but only if clean range is available.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS AFTER THE CHICKS ARRIVE

IF THE CHICKS HAD A HARD TRIP: Instead of using the standard feed and water suggestions listed above, try this: Put 6 more tablespoons of sugar in each gallon of water. Then mix some of this extra sweet water with some of your feed to make a soupy mix. Give your chicks this special feed and water mix for 3 to 4 days to get them over the effects of shipping.

REAR END "PASTING UP": Sometimes the stress of shipping causes the manure to stick to the back of the chick. It is important to remove this daily. Pull off gently. Or better yet, wash off with a cloth and warm water. It will disappear in a few days as the chick starts to grow. Make sure the chicks have access to water at all times.

CORNISH X ROCKS AND BROWN EGG LAYERS: Try starting these chicks on broiler starter. The higher protein seems to help them avoid leg problems. After the first 2 weeks, remove uneaten feed at dusk. Fill the feeders again in the morning. Leave the waterers available 24hrs/day.

QUAIL, PHEASANT, CHUKAR, GUINEA, TURKEY CHICKS: A higher protein feed is needed by the above - 28% to 30% Protein-a must! Many feed companies make an excellent line of gamebird feeds with the needed higher percentage of protein. But if you cannot get this gamebird starter ration, then a turkey starter will be sufficient. For day-old quail, the feed must be ground fine to avoid "starve outs". Quail chicks do best when the brooding floor is warm. Draft free brooding, drinkers with narrow founts are a must for starting quail chicks. Some quail hobbyists add 1-2 T. of red KoolAid to 1 qt. of water for the first few days. The red color seems to be attractive to the quail chicks and encourages them to drink. Turkey poults are slow to start and they like to be warm. Poults have poor eyesight so make sure you have extra feeders and waterers in the brooding area so they can always find one.

EXTRA CAUTION TO THOSE STARTING DUCKLINGS AND GOSLINGS: Do not feed a "medicated" feed to them - ask your feed dealers advice on this! All major feed companies do make a duck & goose starter. You may have to request your feed store special order this starter feed. If using a non-medicated chick feed, add vitamin-niacin to feed or water. Chicken layer ration has too much calcium for young waterfowl. Ducklings have a tendency to become dehydrated during shipping. Initially let the ducklings drink all they want for 10-15 min. Then remove the drinkers for another 10-15 min. Then replace the drinkers for another 10-15 min. and let them drink again. Remove the drinkers again for another 10-15 min. period. Then return the drinkers permanently.

NEW INFORMATION ON BROODING PEACHICKS: Peachicks need warmer brooding temperatures. Start at about 100 deg.F and decrease by 5 deg. F each week until peachicks are fully feathered. Peachicks are VERY sensitive to drafts. Draft free brooding area is a MUST. Hand water each peachick on arrival. Add marbles/small rocks to fount tray to keep peachicks from climbing in. Our breeder starts her peachicks out on scrambled eggs/yogurt for the first few days. Also offer 28% protein starter feed, gamebird or turkey starter. Like turkey poults, peachicks are slow to start. Make sure to change the litter frequently and remove any damp spots.

EMERGENCY FEED - Finely chopped boiled eggs!

GIVE EXTRA ATTENTION to any chick or chicks not starting to eat. It's important they drink & eat early!

SEPARATE CHICK OR CHICKS NOT OFF TO A GOOD START: Your extra attention to hand feed is a MUST!

BE PREPARED: Have your brooder operating at the optimal temperature, the feeders and drinkers filled before the chicks arrive. **GO TO THE POST OFFICE AND PICK UP YOUR CHICKS AS SOON AS THEY ARRIVE.** Let your postmaster know they can call you anytime the chicks come in. The chicks need to be put in the brooder and be fed and watered right away.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS: Always wash your hands well after handling birds, their equipment and poultry manure. Do not kiss or nuzzle any of your birds. Keep birds outside, away from human habitation and food preparation areas. Always supervise young children around birds, making sure they wash their hands well.