

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Basics of Raising Chicks

Q: What are brooders and when do you use it?

A: A brooder is a heated house for chicks. This will be their first home. The size of the brooder will depend on the number of chicks you have. Aim for around 2.5 sq. feet per chick, if possible, but more is better. The floor of the brooder should have a layer of cleaner “litter” (pine shavings or something similar). For very small chicks paper towels over the wood shavings is recommended. Newspaper can be too slippery and can cause foot or leg problems in chicks. The litter needs changed out every couple of days, if not more often, and needs to remain as dry as possible. Cleanliness is very important at this stage. Baby chicks are prone to a number of diseases, some of which thrive in a damp environment. This and other health problems can be avoided with proper sanitation. When chicks are around a month old, add a low roost about 4” off the floor to encourage chicks to begin roosting. Don’t put it directly under the heat lamp; it’ll be too warm there.

Q: What temperature do you maintain?

A: The brooder can be heated by using a light bulb or heat bulb with a reflector. A 100-watt bulb is usually fine, although some people do use an actual heat lamp. The temperature should be 90-95 degrees for the first week in the warmest part of the brooder and should be reduced by about 5 degrees each week after. This should continue until the chicks have their feathers, which typically happens between 5 and 8 weeks old. A thermometer is helpful, but you should be able to tell if the temperature is right by the chicks behavior. If they’re panting or huddling in the corners furthest from the light, they’re too hot. If they’re huddled together in a big ball under the light they’re too cold. You can adjust the temperature by changing the distance of the light or the wattage of the bulb. Make sure to have cooler spots in the brooder where the chicks can cool down if they need to.

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Q: How and what do I feed them?

A: Make sure you always have fresh, clean water available. Place the waterer as far away from the heat lamp as possible. If you're using a bowl, fill it with marbles or clean pebbles to help prevent the chicks from drowning or getting soaked if they accidentally fall in. Even baby chicks scratch at their food, so a feeder that more or less keeps their food in one place is ideal. Again, cleanliness is important, chicks will poop right into their own food, so you must clean and refill it often. Chicks start out on "crumbles". It's specially formulated for their dietary needs. Crumbles typically come in medicated or non-medicated. The medicated has a small amount of Amprolium drug, which helps prevent Coccidiosis. Coccidiosis is disease that chicks are very susceptible to. If you choose to feed them non-medicated feed, you need to pay more attention to the cleanliness. Chick crumbles is a complete feed- no other supplemental feed is necessary. However feeding your chicks treats can be fun! After the first week or two, you can give them small amounts of treats every day. Remember when feeding treats to offer the chicks grit to help them break down the new food. If you cannot find chick size grit, coarse sand works just as well.

Q: What is pasty butt and how do I prevent it?

A: Pasty butt is a condition all chicks are prone to. Pasty butt is where droppings stick to their vents and clog it up, making it impossible for them to relieve themselves. If this is left untreated it can kill them. Check your chicks' bottoms every few hours, especially during the first 2 weeks. If you find a pasty bottom carefully soak and remove the plug, pat the area dry and apply a little vaseline or vegetable oil to the area. Organic apple cider vinegar in their water is found to really help prevent this condition. A ratio of 3-4 tablespoons to a gallon of water is recommended.