

CHICK CARE

Leave newly hatched chicks in the incubator up to 24 hours until they are completely dry and fluffy. Chick are social creatures, they appear to be more content when with another chick as a companion. It is often easier to raise at least two chicks together.

Keep the chicks in a warm, dry, draft-free place where they are protected from dogs, cats, and other animals. The place where you keep your brood of chicks is called a brooder. The simplest brooder is a large sturdy cardboard box. Find or make a box that is big enough to provide 6 square inches of space for each chick.

Fasten a piece of chicken wire to the top of the box so your chicks can get air but pets can't get your chicks. At one end of the box, place a light bulb in a reflector. A reflector with a screw-in light socket costs just a few dollars at the hardware store. A brooder should have one section that is heated, with a temperature of 100 degrees (for the first week) and an unheated section for exercise. Food and water should be partially in heated area.

Place an inch of peat moss, shavings, and sand, or other litter at the bottom of the brooder. Litter keeps chicks warm and dry and absorbs their droppings. It gives chicks something soft to sleep on and a rough surface to walk on. Every day, sprinkle a little clean litter over the old litter; completely cleaning brooder as needed.

Be sure to put shavings on the bottom of the box to prevent chick from developing DEFORMED LEGS. When chicks are on a surface that does not provide adequate traction for their feet they can develop a condition called spradle. This is a condition where their legs and feet splay to the side thus making it impossible for them to walk correctly.

CHICK COMFORT

Chicks can be taken home in about one week. Be sure o continue using the heat source and decrease ONE DEGREE per day until it is down to 70 degrees. Heat from the light will keep your chickens warm. You can tell they are comfortable by the way they act. If they are warm enough, they wander freely around the box. When they sleep, they spread out like a carpet.

Chicks that are not warm enough crowd under the light and cheep loudly. They sleep in a pile and may smother each other. To warm your chicks, make sure the brooder is not drafty and try a stronger light bulb.

When chicks are too warm, they move as far away from the light as they can. They may crowd into the corners of their brooder, possibly smother one another. Reduce the wattage of the light bulb, raise the reflector, or get a bigger box where your chicks can get farther away from the heat.

FEEDING CHICKS

A chick should drink its first water soon after it comes out of the incubator, but it may not eat right away. It is still living on reserves supplied by the yolk it absorbed just before hatching. Feed your chicks a starter ration purchased from the feed store. Starter is higher in protein and lower in calcium than lay ration. Some brands of starter are medicated, some are not. If you take proper care of your chicks and keep their housing clean, medication is not necessary.

The UC Cooperative Extension office in DeWitt, 11477 E Avenue, Auburn has additional information available about raising chickens. 4-H offers the poultry project within the community club structure. Contact Jessica Trumble-Pitel, 4-H Program Representative, at 889-7386 for more information.

