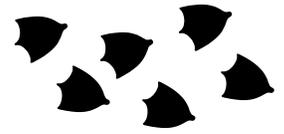


# Duckling Hatching Basics



Hatching ducklings has become a popular variation to hatching baby chicks each year.

Here are a few Duckling Hatching Basics:

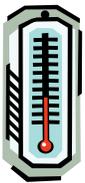
## Holding Eggs Before the Incubation Period

Fertile eggs can be held for about a week after laid before incubation without a problem. The ideal holding temperature is about 60 degrees. A refrigerator is too cold. Turn once a day to prevent membrane sticking to the shell. Development of the embryo only begins when the egg is warmed to the correct temperature.



Waterfowl eggs have a greater tendency to rot and cause problems for two reasons. The first is that ducks are not as clean in their nests and the eggs are often soiled. Waterfowl also take longer to develop allowing another week for bacteria to grow. It is important to keep your incubator clean and wash it out after each group of egg hatches. Each set of eggs needs to be in a clean, disinfected environment as the temperature and humidity in an incubator are ideal for the growth of bacteria.

## Incubator/Temperature:



It is important that the incubator used is tall enough to allow room for the larger duck eggs and has a circulating fan to keep the air temperature even throughout the incubator. The automatic turner is very important for continually rotating the eggs. Turning the eggs is critical during the first week of incubation. In an automatic egg turner set the eggs so that the large end of the egg with the air sac is up with the air sac higher than the small end. Temperature of thermometer is 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit and 86% humidity for Days 1 through 25. The optimal temperature for days 26 through 28 is 98.5 degrees with 94% humidity.

## Humidity:

Duck eggs require a little more humidity than chicken eggs do during incubation. Some breeders suggest that you lightly spray waterfowl eggs daily. 100 degree temperature water in a clean spray bottle.

➔ **Note:** Experience has shown when using the Hova Bator incubator misting once a week for the first three weeks and every other day the final week works. One trough in the bottom is kept full of water until the eggs are removed from the turner on the 25<sup>th</sup> day and then both troughs are kept full until hatch. If water drops appear on the inside of the plexi glass top there is too much humidity present. When the first duckling is beginning to pip the egg, remove the red plugs or tape over the ventilation holes to improve the circulation of fresh air. This is very important as the duckling's bodies are beginning to function and the concentrated ammonia can be toxic to the babies as they are trying to emerge from the eggs.

## Length of Incubation:

The length of incubation time varies. For Mallards, it is about 26.5 to 27 days. For Runners, it is about 28.5 days. All others are about 28 days. If your eggs are old or the incubator is cool, incubation can take longer. If it is too warm, incubation will be completed sooner. Muscovy eggs take around 35 days to incubate.

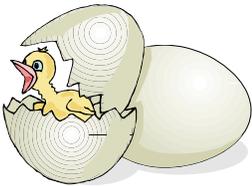
## Candling:

The first candling can be done after seven days of incubation. This involves touching a small bright flashlight to the top of each egg and observing the growth and progress of the egg. The advantage of candling is that you can remove rotten, infected eggs. Eggs are candled in a dark room by shining a flashlight or other bright light into the egg. You should look for veins going from the interior of the egg to the air sac. If you see no clear, distinct blood veins, the chances are that the embryo never developed or died early on. So that you can know what an infertile egg looks like when it is candled, also candle a regular infertile egg that has not been incubated at all. You can see the darker, orange shadow of the yolk. If you are not sure if the embryo is alive or not, return it to the incubator.

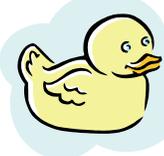


The only eggs you do not want to return are the infected eggs. They are normally dark and blotchy inside and in later stages will crack and ooze foul smelling liquid. If they are returned, the bacteria may continue to grow and you risk the possibility of them exploding in your incubator. You also risk infecting other eggs. Inspect your eggs carefully and remove any that develop cracks and are seeping or smell bad as they incubate.

## Allow the duckling to hatch on its own:



Many people want to help their duckling hatch. It is best to allow them to do the hatching themselves. This process of pecking around in a circle twists the umbilical cord thus no more blood is in the veins of the lining of the shell and the duckling does not bleed when these veins are broken during the hatching process. The only time you want to help them is when they make a hole and then cannot progress because they are stuck in that spot. If an actual hole is made, and you can see the duckling, but no progress is made for 12 hours, check to determine if the lining has dried to the down of the duckling making it impossible for it to move. This condition can be easily remedied by wrapping the egg with one thickness of cloth or paper towel that has been dampened with warm water and return to the incubator for an hour or so. If the duckling gets stuck after it started to break a circle (two inches or more), it can usually be helped without a problem. But if they are progressing on their own, let them be.



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## Caring for ducklings after they hatch:

The baby duckling stays in the incubator for the first twenty-four hours. They don't need food or water during this time as they are utilizing the egg yolk inside their abdomen.

Young ducklings need warmth, food and water and protection. You need to buy or make a "brooder" for their warmth and protection.

## Brooder:

A large clear plastic storage bin works well for a "brooder box" for ducklings. As ducklings love to play in their water and quickly have everything soaked and need to be changed. The clear sides make it possible for easy observation of the ducklings from a distance. As a source of heat, a mechanic's trouble light with clip on attachment and flexible neck works well to adjust the heat. A 60 to 75 watt light bulb works well for a heat source.



The best "bedding" for the first few days is an old bath towel or piece of cloth such as old Tee shirt. Good footing when they are small helps their legs to develop more properly. Don't use hay or straw. It just sticks to them and is harder to clean. Don't use newspaper for the first week or two as they tend to be unable to get their footing and sometimes this causes "spraddle" or "splayed legs". This condition is caused by poor traction with the feet and legs sliding to the side permanently stretching the tendons. This condition makes it impossible for the baby to stand up correctly and can be permanently crippled.

## Water to drink:

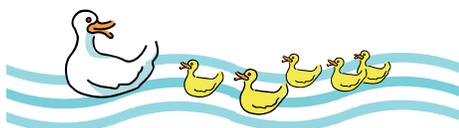
Baby ducklings do need lots of water with their food as they must have water to swallow. A way must be devised for them to drink lots of water without diving into their drinking water. They can drown in that too. A great way to make a drinking water container is to cut a small hole in the side of a plastic milk carton that is big enough for them to put their head into but make the hole too small for them to jump through it. Then fill it with water just up to that hole. The water has to be changed often as they will dirty it up daily (with food). It may be necessary to teach them how to find the water in the beginning by pushing their heads in the water container a few times but once they figure it out, they will go back and forth between their food and water constantly. Once they start eating it seems like they never stop.

## Feed:

Regarding feed...go to a local feed store and ask for “**non-medicated chicken mash**”. It is important to ask for “non-medicated” brands as ducklings eat a lot more than chicks and will poison themselves on the medicated brands. They don’t need the medication like chicks do. They actually can be quite hardy once they begin growing up.

## Water Proofing:

**Never let ducklings play in water unattended, since their oil glands have not developed enough to keep them from drowning!** Baby ducklings hatched away from their mother have no water resistant oil on their down.



They should not be placed in water deeper than their legs and with constant supervision. Instinctually they love playing in the water, but since their oil glands are not able to produce enough oil to keep them afloat they’ll drown easily. In nature baby duckling get their water resistant oils from their mom’s under feathers until they are five or six weeks old and their own oil glands

begin to function. The bottom line is that baby ducks love to swim but without mom around are vulnerable to drowning and chills.

## Protection:

Remember you are the baby duckling’s protector. The most common cause of death in pet ducklings is an attack by a predator. They have no real defense mechanism and are vulnerable to pet dogs or cats or a stray neighborhood pet. You need to be conscious of any animals around their environment and keen to provide protection. It only takes a few seconds for a playful larger animal or predator to kill your baby ducklings. An oven rack, refrigerator shelf or poultry wire molded to shape placed over the top of the brooder will keep ducklings out of predators reach and give the babies a break from constant handling.

