

Moonlight Valley Farm

Poultry Care Sheet



Caring for your new chicks...

Have your equipment ready before the chicks come home. Basic needs include a draft shield (I use large cardboard pallet boxes), a heat lamp, thermometer to regulate heat, feed, waterer, feed tray & bedding.

Feed: For chickens, use a good quality Chick Starter (protein content should be 20% - 22%). For turkeys, ducks, geese and guineas, you will need a chick starter with a higher protein content of 24-28%. Make sure the chicks always have plenty of fresh water available. I typically add a poultry electrolyte/vitamin supplement to their water for the first few days. Green grass clippings can be added to help prevent picking and to get the birds used to foraging at a young age.

Heat: The temperature should be 90 to 95 degrees for the first week. Reduce the temperature 5 degrees per week by raising the heat lamp until you get to 70 degrees. After 4 weeks, they should not need a heat source (except during cold winter months). A good source of heat is a 250 watt bulb. (Red bulbs are better than white as they cause less picking.) Hang the heat lamp 18 inches from the floor of the brooder. The temperature directly under the bulb will be slightly higher than 90 degrees but the birds will adjust themselves to the area they like.

Bedding: Do not use newspaper for bedding as this can cause splayed legs. Pine shavings are best for absorption and tracking. Sawdust should be avoided because the chicks can eat the small pieces. Keep the bedding as dry as possible as soiled & wet bedding can harbor disease.

Problems: A sign of stress during the first few weeks is a **pasty rear-end**. It will kill a chick by obstructing bowel movement. Remove dried manure with a warm washcloth or simply pull it off the chick. The first method is far kinder to the chick but the second method results in no fuzz for the fecal matter to become impacted again. If your chicks begin picking and you are using a white heat lamp, remove it and replace it with a red lamp. Also check the temperature, as temperatures that are too hot can cause picking. Put fresh grass clippings or greens (never use head lettuce) into the brooder twice a day.

After 4 weeks: Birds can range outside on warm days. Make sure that they are protected from predators. I like to use an open bottom wire pen that can be moved around the grass yard. You can install roosts in the brooder to encourage roosting. Do not allow your ducklings or goslings to access swimming water until they are at least 2 months old. Chicks, poults, ducklings & goslings, can be started on grower crumbles after 4 weeks. **NEVER give ducklings or goslings mash feed.** At 10 weeks, Layer mash or crumbles can be started for chicks.

3 Months and Up: Chickens should be given oyster shell supplement for extra calcium. Apple cider vinegar can be added to their water. They can be given fruit & vegetable scraps and occasional treats (such as scratch grains, bread & cooked pasta).

Final Note: Please remember that whether your reason for owning poultry is as companion backyard pets, an egg source, to breed or as a food source, all animals should be treated humanely and cared for properly at all times. If possible, it is best to free range or pasture your poultry and allow them free access to grass, insects, dirt and plants as nature intended. Not only will you have happier healthier birds, you will pay less for feed and have better tasting & healthier eggs. Your poultry should have adequate shelter with roosts and nest boxes and access to fresh clean water at all times. **If at any time you can no longer afford, care for or keep your birds, please contact me and I will take them back.** The animals on our farm are kept as pets, however we do not oppose raising poultry as food, as long as they are treated humanely through every step of the way. It is your responsibility to respect God's creatures, whatever your reason for owning them is.