

Looking After Chickens

Arrival of your Chicks:

Your chicks arrive **Wednesday 24th August 2022 and can be collected from 2.30pm** in the Staffroom. Please bring a **suitable box** to take them home in eg: a shoe box with bedding (see below for bedding details). They will need to be kept warm on your trip home.

Creating a Suitable Living Environment:

This is the one of the most important part of raising happy, healthy chicks. Baby chicks need to be protected from drafts but still need to have adequate ventilation. This can be in the form of a cardboard box with holes for ventilation, a single-faced corrugated cardboard roll, 12" or higher, a large plastic storage bin, or even a kiddie pool! All of the above have been used with success.

Whatever housing solution you go with, make sure it provides 2 square feet per chick. It sounds like an awful lot, but as they get older (and bigger) you'll realize why this is necessary.



A heat source:

Baby chicks need to be kept pretty hot. Think sauna! The first week of their lives they require an air temperature of 35 degrees, the second week 30 degrees, and so on - going down by 5 degrees per week until they're ready to transition to "outside". A 250-watt infrared heat lamp is the best way to achieve this, placed right in the middle of their living area and suspended off the ground. The height of the light will depend on what it takes to achieve your target temperature.

We recommend a red heat bulb for a few reasons: one, with a bright white light constantly glaring it can be hard for them to sleep. The red light is darker and provides them some respite. Two, red lights help prevent them from pecking one another.

Pay close attention to how your chicks behave. If they're all crowded together directly under the heat source, they're cold. Lower the heat lamp or add another one. If they're around the edges of the box, avoiding the heat and each other like the plague, they're too hot! Raise the heat lamp. A happy flock will happily be exploring all around the brooder.

And please do not listen to anyone that tells you a regular old 60 watt bulb will suffice! We've seen chicks die from this bad advice. They really need a lamp intended to produce heat, and as we've mentioned, we recommend the 250-watt variety.

Absorbent bedding:

Baby chicks are big poopers, so make sure to line the floor of their housing unit with an absorbent material. The best, we think, is to spread pine shavings about 1" thick. Resist the urge to use newspaper! It's not nearly as absorbent and the slippery surface can lead to a permanent deformity called "splayed leg" which can ultimate result in the other chickens picking on the affected bird to death. Many people also swear by paper towels, changed often. (DON'T use cedar shavings, no matter what friends or your local feed store tell you: the aromatic oils will irritate your chicks' lungs, and make them more susceptible to respiratory problems later in life.)

A drinker/waterer:

We recommend you don't try to use a dish, a rabbit drinker, or anything you have just "laying around". Baby chicks have special needs when it comes to water. Dishes can make it easy for chicks to drown, and they'll certainly do naughty things like walk in it, spill it, kick their bedding materials into it, and poop in it -- meaning you'll have to change it constantly. Rabbit drinkers aren't preferable, either, because not enough chicks can access it at once. For the best results, we recommend you use a chick waterer. They come in a number of different sizes and shapes, all basically sufficient.

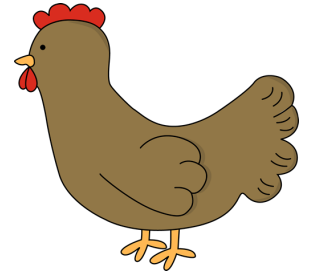
Keep in mind that even with the best drinker, they'll still kick bedding materials into it and find ways to poop in it from time to time. Raising the waterer off the ground somewhat will help (starting their second week of life), but no matter what they're going to get that water messy, so plan on changing it a few times a day.

A feeder:

Once again, we recommend you resist the temptation to use a dish or bowl for feeding your chicks. They're messy, and they'll jump in and kick the feed all over the place, poop in it, and worse case scenario: they'll tip it over and trap a baby underneath. (This has happened!) Spend those few extra dollars and buy a "real" baby chick feeder, or borrow one from a friend.

Ongoing Chick Care:

Keep checking up on your chicks several times a day. They'll be doing naughty things like kicking up their bedding into the feed and water, and you'll have to clean up after them. (Don't forget, they need round-the-clock access to all the food and water they can get their beaks on!) Also pay close attention to their behavior. We said it before and we'll say it again because it's key: If they're crowded together directly under the heat source, they're cold. Lower the heat lamp or add another one. If they're around the edges of the brooder avoiding the heat and each other like the plague, they're too hot! Raise the heat lamp. Not getting this right can be the death of young chicks.



Changing Bedding:

For sanitary purposes and to keep their area from stinking, change their bedding at least once a week. We throw ours in the compost pile where it's happily turned into rich earth.

Dealing with kids & chicks:

If you've got kids or you're planning on bringing kids over to see the chicks, set the boundaries up front. Chicks are irresistibly sweet and cheeky kids tend to harass them. Make sure you watch the chicks; if they show signs of distress, be firm and return them to their brooder. Also, if you have chicks are or were recently pasted up, please instruct your kids to let them be. Over-handling can prevent a chick that's "on the edge" from bouncing back (it can be the death of them!).

Growing... and growing!

As your chicks get older you'll understand why we recommended a minimum of 2 square feet of living space per bird. If you provided them less than that and your older chicks are picking at one another, do expand their living quarters. Both you and the chicks will be much less stressed. And as mentioned above, if they start flying on top of their brooder box, a simple length of deer netting or chicken wire laid on top of their living quarters should prevent it!

"Outside" time:

After the chicks are 2-3 weeks old, if it's warm outside and sunny, feel free to let them have a little "outdoor time"! Put them in a wire cage or erect some other temporary housing and place it in the sun, making sure they have access to water and shade if they need it. They'll absolutely love digging around in the grass. But don't leave them unattended! At this age they're VERY good at flying and VERY susceptible to predators. Plus, if it's windy they'll get cold (and they'll let you know they're unhappy with their loud chirping).

By 4-5 weeks of age your chickens are ready to move outside full-time. And thank goodness! As much as you love them, you'll be thrilled to get them out of your house. Read the next chapters to learn about chicken coop requirements, how to transition them to their coop and how to care for them as they get older. Also, keep in mind that if you're purchasing a chicken coop it can take three or more weeks to arrive, so you may want to have that squared away before you get the chicks!

Judging:

The ribbons are presented for 1st, 2nd, 3rd in each of the four teams - Pukeko, Kiwi, Tui and Takahe.

Rearing: Chickens are the same age when given out so they are looking for the best condition and growth presented on the day.

Tips For Success...

- The more you handle and spend time with your chicken the better the bond.
- Name your chicken quickly and use the name as much as possible.
- Ensure the chicken has a constant food supply for optimum growth.
- Get the chicken eating grain or a particular food it likes out of your hand, which will help when training it.