

Helpful Tips for Taking Care of Your Newly Hatched Chicks

In preparing to bring your baby chicks home there are a few things you should keep in mind:

HOUSING YOUR BABIES

Have a warm, spacious, protected area for your chicks to live for the next four weeks. During the first week baby chicks should be kept at a temperature of around 90° F, reduce heat every week by around 5° F until chicks get used to room temperature. Every so often, turn off the lights for 20 minutes so the chicks can get used to the dark.

Make sure that chicks have a large enough area to get away from the light in case the heat is too much. You may also want to place the chick food and water in an area where there is no direct light. If the chicks huddle towards the heat then it is too cold, if the chicks are not warm enough they may chirp loudly and/or develop diarrhea. If you notice the chicks trying to get as far as possible from the heat then it is too hot, in this case they will cling to the outer edges of their living space and spend less time eating.

Baby chicks are most comfortable when they are spread out and quiet. These are baby animals and they should be treated with lots of care. If a chick is constantly chirping loudly then something is bothering them— it could be that they are hungry, thirsty, too cold or too hot.

Light is very important for baby chicks because it does affect their growth. During the day you may take your chicks outside for some fresh air and natural light. Sunlight is very good for baby chicks, but make sure they are being supervised. If you leave the chicks alone outside make sure that they are very well protected. Animals such as cats, mongoose, rats and sometimes dogs are willing to do anything to get at baby chicks. Make sure that they are in a large cage or coop that will protect the chicks from the sides, the top, and the bottom (if the chicks are on dirt or sandy ground be sure to place a cover over the ground so predators cannot dig to get at chicks).

Chicks may be raised for the first four weeks in a cardboard box or brooder. If you are using a cardboard box be sure to use a textured paper that the chicks can walk around on, such as construction paper. Baby chick's legs are very fragile so do not use newspaper or any other paper that would be too slippery. You may also put pine shavings over the textured paper for their litter (don't use hardwood shavings), but do this only after they get used to eating chick food and water. Make sure that chicks are given good ventilation.

Note: All baby chicks that are purchased from us have been vaccinated with Pox and Mareks vaccines.

WATERING AND FEEDING YOUR BABIES

Water is extremely important to baby chicks. They need water to maintain their digestion, metabolism, and respiration systems. Water also helps to regulate their body temperature. If a chick loses 10 percent of its water content, it could suffer through dehydration and other physical problems. You may lightly dip your baby chicks beak into their water dispenser as you place them in their living quarters for the first time to get them familiar with it, but baby chicks are quite smart so that may not even be necessary. Naturally, a chick will need to drink more and more water the older they get— please be sure that they are supplied with fresh, clean water at all times.

The best type of water dispenser for baby chicks are plastic one-quart water dispensers with a metal or plastic base. After about a week when chicks are bigger you may elevate the water dispenser so that the litter will not get as soiled. Remember, chicks are baby animals and they do make a mess because they are only starting to discover and learn their surroundings.

WATERING AND FEEDING YOUR BABIES (cont.)

The best feed to give to your baby chick is a chick starter or chick mash. The chick food will provide the chicks with a balanced nutrition as well as prevent disease. Do not feed the baby chick any adult chicken food such as broiler starters or lay starters. Each chick will consume approximately one lb of chick starter per week.

During the first week of life you can place the chick food in a shallow dish that is easy for the chicks to get to. Baby chicks can make a mess, so be sure to keep an eye out for any droppings in their food or water. If this happens dispose of the food or water; wash the container well, and replace with new food or water. As the chicks get older and start to scratch at the ground (about 2-3 weeks old) you may replace the dish with a chick feeder. Chicks will scratch the food out with their beaks so it is a good idea to keep the chick feeders only 2/3 full. The chick feeder should be the same height as the chicks back.

You will eventually need to upgrade to a bigger feeder as the chicks get older. When you do this keep the old one around for a few days and use both feeders, so the chicks can adjust to the new one. Also remember to keep food and water away from direct light. Refill feed if needed at the end of the day, it is okay to let the chicks eat their food till they reach the bottom of their feeder this will ensure that their food always stays fresh and will enhance the cleanliness in the area that chicks are being kept.

MAINTENANCE:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling your baby chick.
- Like any other baby animal baby chicks are very fragile at this young age.
- Clean chick area with a safe, nontoxic disinfectant twice a week, and change litter and/or textured paper daily (or more if needed).
- **DO NOT GET CHICKS WET!!!** There will be times when a chick will jump into its water dispenser and the heat lamp will help dry the chicks. Do not allow chicks to get wet if you can help it. Chicks do not need bath, and do not like cold, wet weather.
- Baby chicks love to be loved, so cuddle and pet them, but try not to handle them too much until they are older.
- It is good to allow your chicks to build a strong immunity to its environment, so introducing them to the outside is a good idea, but make sure that the grass or ground was not recently treated with any pesticides, fertilizers or chemicals.
- Chicks stress easily, so always be sure that they have adequate food and water, a good source of heat, and enough ventilation and space. You will be able to tell if the ventilation is not good enough because there will be a strong ammonia smell that will linger in the air. If this is the case, increase ventilation, but be sure it is not drafty.
- Do not house baby chicks with larger or adult chickens. The larger birds may peck at the baby chicks. Wait about a month or so, then slowly allow both the chicks and the larger chickens to get used to their new companions and surroundings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT TAKING CARE OF BABY CHICKS...

**Check out these helpful websites...*

www.geocities.com/sseagraves/fromeggtochick.htm

extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/pnw/pnw491.pdf (no need www.)

www.angelfire.com/md3/poultrylovers/begin1.html

**Also, this book is very helpful...*

"Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens" by Gail Damerow