



Front Yard Coop

### **New Arrivals:**

Many of you will be receiving chicks from commercial hatchery. Your cardboard box will arrive full of peeping chicks barely 36 hours old. Chicks have enough nutrition remaining from their yolk sac to last a good while, but they need water and warmth immediately. Be prepared. We have learned that it is best to begin preparing for the chicks a few days before they arrive so their new home is ready for them immediately. Buy a 250 watt heat bulb, preferably red light. Hang it 18 inches from the floor of their space, which should be either a large box or an escape-proof floor space. Make sure your box is sufficiently large so the chicks have room to get away from the heat if they need to. Cover the bottom of their area with newspaper, which you will change daily for the first 3 or 4 days. (After that, you can use bedding for the chicks instead of paper. Ask your local feed store for bedding appropriate to baby chicks.) It can be tricky to get your light at exactly the right distance and brightness to maintain its initial temperature. A lamp with a dimmer is great for this, as it can be lowered gradually. Remember that your chicks have come from a 100 degree environment and need to be gently weaned or “hardened” to lower temperatures over time. The initial temperature should be 90 to 95 degrees for the first week. The temperature under the light will be higher than this, but your chicks will find a spot that is right for them. Reduce the temperature by 5 degrees per week until you get to 70. They shouldn’t need any additional heat after that. Be sure to use an accurate thermometer in your box, and keep your chicks away from drafts. If they are all huddled together directly under the light, they are cold. If they are huddled in a corner away from the light, they are probably hot.

**Water:** Have a gallon of water per 50 chicks. For the first two days, you can add 3 teaspoons of sugar to each quart of water for extra energy. Plain water should be given thereafter. As soon as your chicks arrive home, they will be thirsty. Take each chick’s beak and dip it in the water. Never let your chicks run out of water. Make sure your waterers are on the shallow side to avoid drowning; these little guys are weak and vulnerable. We have had babies drown in waterers that were too deep.

**Food:** Buy a commercial chick starter to use for the first two months. Starter is usually medicated, which is very important. Also important, though, is that only your baby chicks get it. If you are also raising ducklings, be sure you do not give medicated feed to them. Your local feed store should have this or be able to order it for you. Sprinkle it on the newspaper for the first 3 days. Be sure to change the newspapers the whole time. After this, put the feed in a low trough or container that the chicks can and see and reach easily. We usually give new chicks some finely chopped scrambled eggs for the first

week or so in addition to starter crumbles. It is good protein and easy for them to eat. Make sure all of them are getting food and water; if you notice anyone having a difficult time, separate them and be sure to hand feed if possible. If you spend time watching your babies, it should be clear to you if there are any that are not doing well.

**Special Notes:** Before your chicks arrive, read up on them. Many websites that sell chicks offer great books on the subject. Occasionally a chick's rear end gets pasted up with manure. Gently wash this with warm water and check to be sure that it stops after a couple of days. Be sure that you and your children ALWAYS wash your hands after handling birds, their equipment, bedding, etc. DO NOT kiss them, or put your mouths anywhere near them, and do not keep them inside. Make sure to enjoy while they're at this phase! Happy hatchlings are active (eating and drinking and making noise) and are very entertaining. Sometimes they will fall asleep by falling flat onto their faces, and sometimes they sleep in fuzzy yellow piles. Either way, chick-watching can provide hours of entertainment.

Introducing a new (older) bird:

We often buy pullets or full grown hens. Some care should be taken to integrate them into an existing flock. We like to start out by placing the new chicken in a separate cage next to or within the larger flocks larger pen or coop. This eliminates the abrupt newness factor. After a couple of days, we introduce the bird to the flock under our supervision. New members of a backyard flock will generally have to bear up to an assault or two as both new birds and old establish dominance. It is what animals do, and it needs to be done, but be sure you don't lose anyone in the process. This greet/attack phase can go on for a few hours, so give the new chicken some room to run. At this stage you not leave them alone for long, and certainly not overnight in the same coop. Over time a new bird will become a full-fledged member of the flock with its rightful place in the pecking order, and peace will reign again.

In General:

Keep a watchful eye on your chickens. Is everyone eating and getting their share? Is everyone moving normally, and being appropriately vocal? Pick each bird up, check its weight, its feathers for pecks, its vent for cleanliness, and its skin for bugs and color. Unless you understand Chickenesse, the only way for you to know when something is wrong with a bird is to be familiar with them. If you know how they normally behave, you will know when they are behaving abnormally. If your chickens free range in your front yard and someone wanders off to the back yard, it might be trying to tell you something.

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