

Preparing For Your New Chicks



Prepare the Brooder

Young chicks need to spend their first few weeks in a warm and draft-free environment, called a brooder. Your brooder can be as simple as a cardboard box- however it needs to be in a secure, safe place. Your brooder should both contain the chicks as they grow (and begin to test their wings) and protect them from small children and pets. There should be adequate fresh air flow, but the air contained with the chicks needs to be at a constant temperature and not drafty. Chicks will need a constant heat source until they grow their feathers at around five to six weeks. While you can use a traditional heat lamp, we recommend the safer and more natural method of brooding with an electric brooder plate. This heated plate stands on four adjustable legs and mimics the heat of a mother hen, while also allowing the chicks to experience a natural light cycle. It is also much less of a fire hazard than a traditional high temperature heat lamp.

Select the Bedding

We recommend pine shavings as bedding for your new chicks. It should be about 1-2 inches deep in order to provide good footing. Change any bedding as needed to keep the brooder dry and as clean as possible. Do not brood chicks on newspaper or other slick surfaces as it can lead to difficulty in standing for the young birds.

Obtain Food and Water Containers

Chicks need chick-sized food and water containers. Food containers should not allow the chicks to walk through the food, as they will soil it. Waterers may need to be elevated, such as on a brick or block of wood, in order to keep the chicks from kicking pine shavings into them. Even with that precaution, you will end up needing to change the water several times a day to keep it clean. Your chicks will be several days old when you pick them up, and this allows us to make sure they have learned how to use a chick waterer and how to find food. You will just need to make sure the food and water is easily available to all the chicks.

Select and Purchase Food

Chicks need to eat "Chick Starter". This is a finely ground, high protein food mix that meets their rapid growth needs. Excellent brands of organic chick starter are available from local/regional companies such as Scratch and Peck out of Bellingham and In Seasons Farms from British Columbia.

They can be purchased at local outlets such as the Food Co-op, Cenex and the Co-Op Farm and Garden in Sequim. Talk with us if you need advice on where to purchase a quality food for your new birds. With all types of feed, you will need to make sure that your birds always have access to a clean, ample water supply. You will also want to start providing your chicks with chick-sized grit. Since birds don't have teeth, they need to ingest small stones in order to properly digest their food. Chick grit can be purchased at the same feed stores at which you purchase feed. While adult birds will eat grit alone as they need it, chicks do best initially if you sprinkle small amounts on their food as if you were salting it. You will want to provide feed full time and free choice to your chicks.

In addition to their basic feed, chicks can be offered small bits of greens, small worms and other bugs from the garden after they are fully acclimated to their new home. But at this stage, consider those like dessert, not the main course. Starter feeds contain everything chicks need to survive and thrive, and filling them up with too much other foods can throw off their nutritional balance.

Signs to Watch

Happy and healthy chicks will be active and eat heartily. They will be quiet when they are sleeping, talk softly amongst themselves when content, and peep loudly when cold, lost or lonely. Watch their behavior in order to gauge how comfortable they are and whether their brooder is comfortable for them. If you notice things such as listlessness, a poop encrusted vent, or lack of appetite be sure to contact us for advice. Baby chicks can be fragile, so make sure to limit the amount of time they are handled for the first few weeks and only allow children to have supervised access to them.

One last word of advice is for all members of the family to thoroughly wash their hands after handling the chicks or cleaning their brooder. And no kissing the chickens! This advice should be followed throughout their lifetime.

Thank you for purchasing your chicks from local farmers who breed to a humane, sustainable standard of poultry production. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions about your new family members.

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