



FARM · FLOCK · FLOWERS

Hatching Chicken Eggs

A DAY-BY-DAY GUIDE FROM SETTING TO HATCH

It takes about **21 days** for a chick to hatch, and there's very little in farm life quite as lovely to watch. Look after the temperature, the humidity and the turning, and your eggs will do the rest. Follow these steps in order and enjoy every day of it.

Step 1 · Get the incubator ready

- Set the incubator up **1-2 days before** the eggs go in — like warming an oven.
- Target temperature: **99-102°F**.
- Target humidity: **45-55%**. Check it with a digital hygrometer.
- Make sure there is good airflow — developing chicks need fresh air.
- Clean and sanitize the incubator before the eggs go in.

Tip: Run the empty incubator for a full day first and watch that the temperature holds steady before you trust it with eggs.

Step 2 · Choosing and setting the eggs

- **Do not wash the eggs.** They carry a natural coating called the bloom that protects them from bacteria.
- Store eggs **pointy-end down** for 1-2 days before setting them.
- Mark one side of each egg with an **X** and the other with an **O** in pencil — that is how you keep track of turning.

Step 3 · Days 1-18: Incubation

TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY

- Hold **99-102°F** and **45-55%** humidity.
- Check both at least twice a day.

TURNING THE EGGS

- Turn **at least 3 times a day** — always an odd number, so the eggs don't rest on the same side every night.
- An automatic turner does this for you.
- Turning by hand: wash your hands first, and be gentle.
- **Stop turning on Day 18.** That is when lockdown begins.

CANDLING — OPTIONAL, BUT WORTH DOING

- Shine a bright light through the egg in a dark room to see what is going on inside.
- **Day 7:** a dark spot with fine veins running out from it — that is a live embryo.
- **Day 14:** the embryo fills most of the egg and the air cell is easy to see.
- Pull any clear eggs (never fertile) or any showing a blood ring (stopped developing).

Tip: Candle in a dark room for the best view. A good flashlight works as well as anything sold for the job.

Step 4 · Day 18: Lockdown

CRITICAL PHASE

What you do in these last three days decides how many chicks make it out of the shell.

- **Stop turning.** Lay the eggs on their sides in the hatching tray.
- Raise humidity to **65–70%** — this keeps the membrane from drying and shrink-wrapping the chick inside the shell.
- Do not open the incubator during lockdown unless you absolutely have to.
- Add water through the outside ports if your incubator has them, so the lid stays shut.
- Keep an eye on temperature — it still needs to hold.

Step 5 · Days 19–21: Hatching

- Around **Day 19–20**, watch for a **pip** — the chick's first break in the shell.
- **Internal pip:** the chick breaks into the air cell. You may hear chirping before you see anything.
- **External pip:** a small hole or crack on the outside of the shell.
- From the first pip, a full hatch can take **12–24 hours or more**. Be patient.
- **Do not help** unless a chick has been stuck for 24+ hours and is clearly in distress — helping too early usually kills them.
- Do not open the incubator while chicks are hatching. The humidity drop can shrink-wrap the eggs that haven't pipped yet.
- Leave newly hatched chicks inside for **12–24 hours** to dry off and fluff up.

Step 6 · After the hatch

- Move dry, fluffy chicks to a brooder held at **95°F** for the first week.
- Give chick starter crumbles and fresh water right away.
- Drop the brooder temperature **5°F each week** until they are feathered out, around 6 weeks.
- Chicks absorb the yolk before hatching and can go 2–3 days without food — there is no rush if a few are still hatching.
- Clean and sanitize the incubator once the hatch is finished.

Tips for a good hatch

- Use a **digital** thermometer and hygrometer. Analog dials are not accurate enough.
- Keep the incubator out of direct sun, away from drafts and heater vents.
- Keep a hatch log – temperature, humidity and what you see, every day.
- Humidity matters as much as temperature. Don't ignore it.
- Don't overcrowd. Eggs need space and airflow.
- Fresh farm eggs hatch at **80–90%**. Shipped eggs run **50–70%** – that is normal.

QUICK REFERENCE

PHASE	DAYS	TEMPERATURE	HUMIDITY	KEY TASK
Incubation	1-18	99-102°F	45-55%	Turn eggs 3× a day
Lockdown	18	99-102°F	65-70%	Stop turning
Hatching	19-21	99-102°F	65-70%	Leave the lid shut
Brooder	After hatch	Start at 95°F	—	Feed and water

Wishing you a wonderful hatch.

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