



FARM · FLOCK · FLOWERS

Raising Baby Chicks

DAY ONE THROUGH MOVING OUTSIDE

Your chicks have hatched – congratulations! They're in your care now, and this guide will see you through: keeping them warm, fed and thriving from their very first day right up to the morning they join the flock outside.

1 · Setting up the brooder

HOW MUCH SPACE

- Allow $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 sq ft per chick for the first two weeks, then more as they grow.
- A large plastic tote, a cardboard box or a wooden brooder box all work.
- Add a wire lid once they get active – they can jump out sooner than you'd think.

BEDDING

- Best choices: **pine shavings or hemp bedding**, 2–4 inches deep.
- For the first three days, lay paper towels on top so chicks learn to eat feed, not bedding.
- **Never** use cedar shavings (toxic), newspaper (too slippery) or sand for young chicks.
- Spot-clean daily; full bedding change every 3–5 days. Wet bedding spreads disease.

KEEPING THEM WARM

- **Week 1:** 95°F directly under the heat source.
- Drop **5°F each week** until they are fully feathered, around six weeks.
- Use a red heat-lamp bulb or a brooder plate. Red is easier on them than white.
- Always leave a **cooler zone** – chicks regulate themselves by moving toward or away from the heat.

TOO COLD

Huddled tight in a pile directly under the lamp.

TOO HOT

Panting, pressed to the far walls, away from the lamp.

JUST RIGHT

Spread out, moving around, peeping contentedly.

SAFETY

Secure every heat lamp with a chain or a second clip. A lamp that falls into bedding starts a fire in seconds.

2 · Water

- Use a chick waterer with a **shallow trough** – chicks drown in deep water.
- Put clean marbles or pebbles in the trough for the first week as extra insurance.

- Change the water at least once a day, more if it gets dirty.
- Keep the waterer near the heat but **not directly under it**.
- For the first 1-3 days, add poultry electrolytes to help them get started.
- Raise the waterer slightly on a block to keep bedding out of it.

Check it daily. A chick that gets wet and chilled can go downhill very fast, so make sure the waterer isn't leaking.

3 · Feeding

WHAT TO FEED, AND WHEN

- **Day 1 – 8 weeks:** chick starter, 18-20% protein. Medicated starter helps prevent coccidiosis.
- **Weeks 8-18:** grower / pullet feed, 16-18% protein.
- **18 weeks and up:** layer feed, 16% protein plus calcium. Offer oyster shell on the side once they start laying.

FEEDING NOTES

- Keep feed in front of them at all times – chicks eat many small meals a day.
- Use a proper chick feeder to cut waste and keep the feed clean.
- Offer chick grit once they eat anything besides starter feed.
- Keep feed dry. Wet feed molds fast and moldy feed makes chicks very sick.

DO NOT SKIP THIS

Never feed layer feed before 18 weeks. The calcium load can permanently damage a young bird's kidneys.

4 · Health — what to watch for

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY CHICK

- Active and curious, moving around the brooder.
- Eating and drinking regularly.
- Clear, bright eyes with no goop or crust.
- Clean bottom, nothing stuck to the down.
- Standing steady – no wobbling or falling over.
- Peeping contentedly rather than screaming.

COMMON PROBLEMS

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	WHAT TO DO
Pasty butt	Droppings caked over the vent	Clean gently with warm water; check brooder temperature
Coccidiosis	Bloody droppings, tired, hunched	Treat the whole group with Corid immediately
Spraddle leg	Legs splaying out sideways	Non-slip bedding; hobble the legs with vet wrap 24-48 hrs
Wry neck	Head twisted or tilted back	Vitamin E and selenium; see a vet in serious cases
Pecking	Feather picking, blood on chicks	Reduce crowding; switch to a red bulb; add enrichment
Breathing trouble	Wheezing, rattling, runny nose	Isolate the chick; improve ventilation; call a vet
Chilling	Lethargic, cold, piling up	Warm slowly under the lamp; check the temperature right away

COCCIDIOSIS

The single biggest danger to young chicks. Watch for bloody or watery droppings, ruffled feathers, tiredness and going off feed. Treat the **whole group** with Corid in the water at the first sign. Medicated feed helps prevent it but will not cure an active outbreak – keep Corid on hand before you need it.

5 · Week-by-week timeline

AGE	TEMP	FEED	WHAT'S HAPPENING
Week 1	95°F	Medicated starter	Dip beaks in water; paper towels over the shavings
Week 2	90°F	Starter	Wing feathers coming in; very active – remove paper towels
Week 3	85°F	Starter	Tail feathers emerging; expand the brooder
Week 4	80°F	Starter	Feathering speeds up; pecking order forms
Weeks 5-6	75°F	Starter → grower	Nearly feathered; short outdoor trips on warm days
Weeks 7-8	65-70°F	Grower	Fully feathered; can move outside in mild weather
Weeks 9-18	Outside	Grower / pullet	Living outside; slowly meeting the adult flock
18 weeks +	Outside	Layer feed	First eggs, usually 18-24 weeks depending on breed

6 · Moving outside

- Start with short, supervised outdoor trips on warm days (65°F+) from weeks 4-5.
- Move out permanently once fully feathered – usually 6-8 weeks.
- If nights drop below 50°F, young pullets still need supplemental heat.
- Introduce grass and soil gradually. Sudden exposure can set off coccidiosis in unvaccinated birds.

JOINING AN EXISTING FLOCK

- Never put baby chicks straight in with adult chickens.
- Wait until pullets are **12-16 weeks** old.
- Use the see-but-don't-touch method – wire mesh between them for 1-2 weeks first.
- Introduce at night when the birds are calm, and set out multiple feed and water stations.
- Some pecking is normal. Step in only if a bird is actually bleeding.

Things worth knowing

- Handle chicks every day from day one – friendly chicks grow into friendly chickens.
 - Keep a journal of temperatures and behavior. Patterns show up fast.
 - At week 2, add a clump of grass and dirt to the brooder. Good microbes, and it keeps them busy.
 - Hang a small cabbage or a bundle of greens as a toy to head off boredom pecking.
 - Chicks are vulnerable to hawks from above – always cover outdoor runs.
 - First eggs from young hens are often small or double-yolked. Normal.
 - Chickens molt once a year, usually in fall. Normal, not a health problem.
 - Oregano, thyme and lavender in the coop work as natural germ-fighters and bug repellents.
 - Scratch grains are a treat, not a complete feed. Never make them the main diet.
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Enjoy every moment with them.

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