

RAISING CHICKENS

Care: Normally your chick would have a mother hen keeping it warm under her wings, and showing it how to eat and drink and peck and scratch. That's your job as you raise it. You need to keep your chicks safe and warm, and make sure they always have fresh food and water. They're little and don't understand about keeping things clean and tidy - that's going to be your job for at least twice a day while they are growing up.

Your Chick will need:

- Chick starter feed and container
- An old cardboard box or fish bin
- Water dish, (not too deep)
- Lamp or hanging light bulb over a box or fish bin lined with newspaper.



A larger area is needed as the chicks grow, (rabbit/guinea pig hutch is a good alternative) leading to chook house and run. They will of course reward you with eggs around 5 months of age!

Housing: When you bring your baby chicks home they need to stay very warm in their box. Think about how warm it would be under a mother hen's wings. The temperature in their box should be about 33 degrees Celsius for the first week, reduced down weekly until it is about 15 degrees Celsius. A forty or sixty watt bulb hung over the box and about 30 cm above the chicken will provide a good temperature. Make sure it is secure and cannot burn the chicks or start a fire. How long you keep them under the lamp will depend on how many chicks you have and what the weather is doing. Your chick/ens need to be in a dry and draught free area, which can be cleaned easily. By using newspaper as a floor or a cardboard box, you can simply throw it out and replace it with clean sheets of paper or a fresh box. Don't leave your chicks on wet dirty newspaper as they can become sick very easily if they are wet, dirty and cold. As the chickens grow, so should the area they live in.

Feeding: 1-2 Weeks: Feed Chicken Starter Crumbles as they have the right balance of minerals and vitamins for raising healthy chickens. NRM Chick Starter also contains a coccidiostat to protect young chicks.

Start with about a tablespoon of crumbles mixed with water in a flat bowl so it's like porridge, per chick twice a day. Increase the amount a little each day as they are growing. You can also scatter some dry crumbles on the ground so they learn how to peck their food.

By the end of the first week you can leave the food in with the chicks so they can feed when they are hungry. You will need to clean the bowl out before you fill it each time.

By the end of the second week, if it is warm outside, you can put the chicks into a safe, contained area (covered to protect from cats or hawks or bigger chooks) outside so they can peck at grass and soil during the day. Give them their food and water as well. Make sure there is a covered area that they can nestle in if it should get wet or cold during the day. At night they need to be brought back inside to their box with their light for warmth.

Chick Starter crumbles can be fed to chicks up to age 6-8 weeks. They can then be fed grower feed pellets or mash.

Gradually replace the crumbles with the mash or pellets. Ensure access to fresh water. Your chicks will also enjoy spinach and silverbeet, and comfrey.

6-8 Weeks Plus: Feed Grower feed for chicks aged 6-16 weeks.

16 Weeks Plus: Feed Layer hens mash or pellets.

Water: Chicks need easy access to fresh clean water in a container that they can reach, but set out so that the chicks can't get wet by walking in it. Put stones or marbles in the dish so the chicks can't get too wet or drown. Water needs to be kept clean and fresh. Chicks can die if they do not start drinking by the time they are 4 days old. When you first put them in their box you can dip their little beak in the water gently so they know where it is.

When to move them outside: By about 8 weeks of age the chicks should be able to stay outside in a run with a draught free house. Once they are outside overnight don't bring them back in. By Ag Day they should be in a run with a chook house.

If you are putting them into an existing chicken run with other older chooks, never add a single bird. One bird will be picked on by the others and possibly killed. It is better to add several new birds together. Or put them in a smaller cage within the chicken coop overnight to let them get used to each other. Birds establish a "pecking order". Older birds usually dominate younger birds. But the hierarchy is normally from strongest to the weakest. This usually sorts itself out quickly with no need for you to worry over petty squabbles.

Some useful facts about chickens:

- Chickens are blind in the dark.
- Control scaly mites on chicken legs by wiping vaseline or vegetable oil on the leg.
- Pine needles and pine shavings make excellent litter to absorb droppings and moisture.
- Chickens need fresh air, fresh water and sunshine to help them stay healthy.
- Reduce stress or fear in chicks by talking quietly or singing softly when you are around them.
- These plants are toxic to chickens so do not feed them or give them access: avocado, kowhai, green potatoes, rhubarb, parsnip, parsley, celery, sorrel, fathen, oxalis, lily of the valley, oleander, box.
- Allow a minimum of square metre of space for your chicks when they are up to 6 weeks old.
- Up to 7-18 weeks old; 2 sq metres and after that more than 3 sq metres.
- If your chickens free range during the day, to allow for wet days and for the 15 hours of darkness in winter it's better to have a density of 6-7 birds per square metre in the coop they sleep in at night. ●

Further reference:

This information has been compiled from reliable sources; however, we recommend that you seek expert advice about any aspect of chicken rearing you are not familiar with. Falloons, Farmlands, RD1 and your local Vet are good sources for information. www.lifestyleblock.co.nz, www.facebook.com/yourpoultry and www.chooks.co.nz have loads of information.



AG DAY JUDGING:

On Ag day the chicks and students will be judged on the following categories:

- **Most Obvious Pet Chicken-** The friendliest and easily handled. This can be accomplished by handling the bird as much as possible. A chicken will happily sit on your lap for long periods of time. The judge will ask children to take their chicken out of the cage and hold it for a minute while they examine it and the judge will generally be looking for a good bond between the child and the chicken throughout the judging.
- **Rearing and Grooming** – how well the chicken is presented (plumage, free of lice, healthy comb) and the student's general knowledge about rearing their chicken. The children will be asked questions about the care and feeding of their chicken and the judge will be checking to see if it is healthy and has been well cared for. This means that it will have bright eyes, clean legs (without mites), and the bird is well covered and comfortable.

