

GUIDE TO REARING YOUR Chicken



Selection of the Chick

Chicks are usually found via local contacts. Most schools have a source that they order from, otherwise ask if they know of one.

Always order more than one chick. Chicks like to huddle to keep warm and are very social. Ordering more than one will also cover you if there are any mishaps!

When choosing your chicks, pick ones that are alert and energetic. Any that are shivery or limp may be unwell.

The chicks will only be a day or two old when you receive them so will need a lot of care. Make sure you have prepared a nice warm and safe area for them before you pick them up and take them home.

The four most important things to keep your chick happy are: Food and water, good temperature, good housing and a clean living area.

Basic Rearing Needs

- One x 10kg bag of chick crumble
- Chick feeder
- Chick water container
- Cage / box / container (as a brooder)
- Wood shavings or shredded paper
- Heat lamp

Setting up your Chick's home (Brooder)

The chicks first home will be the brooder. A brooder can be as simple as a large cardboard box, or large container. It should have high and solid sides so the chicks cannot jump out and to prevent drafts. It should be easy to clean and have enough room for the chicks to move around.

Litter

You will need to lay litter of some sort around the bottom. Shredded paper or wood shavings (not dust) are perfect for this. Change the litter as soon as it is wet to avoid the chicks catching a chill. Damp, warm areas are also perfect condition for diseases such as coccidiosis.

Temperature

The temperature needed for baby chicks is 32-38°C. To achieve this, you will need to purchase a heat lamp.

You can purchase brooding lamps from your rural supply store that will work especially well. Alternatively, a clip light from a lighting shop with a 60-100w reflector bulb or a workman's light hung approx 300mm above the chicks does the job, but ensure that it gives enough heat.

Whatever you choose be careful that the bulb is not able to make contact with the litter in the box or the chicks directly. Kids be careful!

Your chick's behaviour will help to show if the temperature is right. If they are constantly huddling directly under the light they are too cold, but if they are sitting at the opposite end from the light source and panting they are too hot.

If you are still concerned you can check the temperature of the box with a thermometer. It's good to have an area that's warm and a cooler area, so the chicks can move to where they are comfortable.

Each week raise the light slightly so the temperature lowers by approximately 2-3°C. Once they are feathered up (5-8 weeks old) they can start to venture outside during the day (if it's warm) and come in at night.

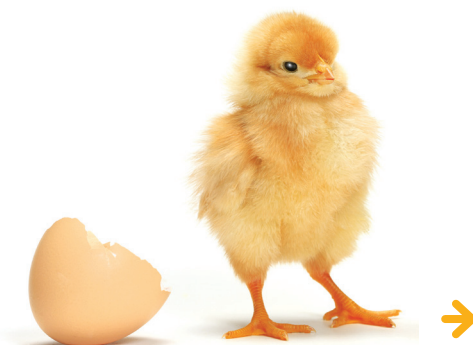
Feeding

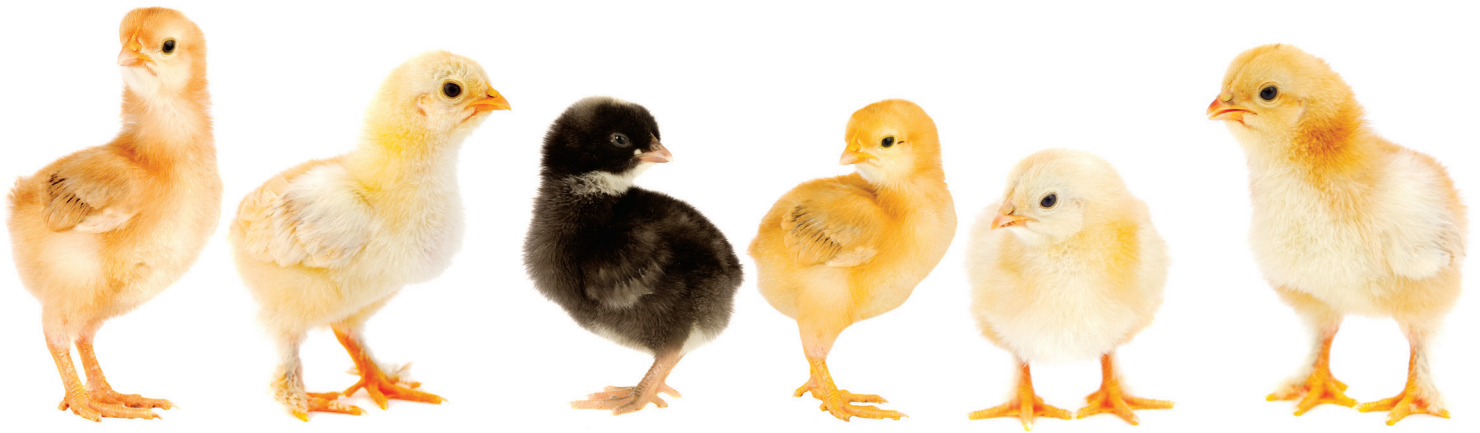
Chicks will want to peck around and find something to eat straight away. The best thing you can buy for your chicks is "chick crumbs or starter". This is formulated for young birds and can be fed until they are 18 weeks old.

Check that the crumbs have a protein level of 20% and a coccidiostat. Chick crumbs should be available at all times and kept in a shallow dish or bowl or a chick feeder to keep the food clean and in one place. Chicks will make a mess in a dish flicking it around and pooing, so a chick feeder is best. No other feed is necessary for the young birds and greens should not be fed as this can cause diarrhoea.

Ensure there is always fresh clean water available for your chicks. If using a bowl, make sure it's not deep enough for the chicks to get into and not be able to get out as this will cause them to get damp. You can source good chick drinking containers from your vet or rural supply store which keep water fresh and prevent swimmers! Place it away from your lamp to keep it cool and fresh and change the water daily as chicks have a habit of making a bit of a mess!

At 1-2 weeks old you may find that your chicks start to learn to fly! At this point it will pay to put a frame with netting over the brooder. Chicken wire is easily shaped over the brooder and won't stop your light from keeping the chicks warm.





Keeping your Chicks healthy

- Chicks are prone to a problem called “pasty butt” where droppings stick to their bottoms and block it up. As you can imagine this makes it very difficult for them to go to the toilet and can cause infections. Check your chicks’ bottoms daily and if they are looking grubby give them a gentle wipe with a warm wet paper towel.
- Buy chick feed with a coccidiostat in it to prevent coccidiosis.
- At around 12 weeks of age they will need to be wormed. Speak to your local vet about what product is suitable.
- Lice and mites are parasites that live on the skin. The signs often stealth, but will have a big impact on your birds, so make sure you check regularly. Note that Red Mites are nocturnal, so you won’t see them on the birds during the day, but they cause pale combs and death.



Requirements as they grow

When your chicks get to around 5-8 weeks old they can start spending time outside (if it’s warm). Make sure they have a warm secure hutch or coop. One that has a warm hiding area and also a spot where they can enjoy the sun is perfect!

They will also appreciate somewhere to jump on and roost. A thin broom handle (a piece of doweling) across the hutch about 15 cm off the ground works well. You may also like to put this in their brooder, so they can learn early.

Make sure to have them on chick starter at the same time as they are moved outside. Moving outside and changing diets at the same time can lead to a disease called coccidiosis.

Points to remember

1. Regularly check water and food and change as required.
2. Check your chicks are warm enough and their house is clean.
3. Handle and spend time with your chicks.
4. Remember you chicks are like babies and will need lots of rest.

Tips for Success

1. The child should always feed the chicks, mum or dad can assist younger children if needed. It is important to ensure they are warm enough.
2. Give your chick treats when training it. Some good treats are cat food, boiled egg or mince.
3. Spend lots of time with your chick so you build a bond and it will come when called.
4. Don’t forget to take its food and water requirements with you on Ag day.
5. If you are required to complete a project or diary, make sure you take lots of photos from the day you get your chicken until Ag day.
6. Learn about chickens, there is lots of information at the library or on the internet.

If you have any concerns about your chick’s health, please don’t hesitate to contact your local Franklin Vets Clinic. We are happy to give advice over the phone on whether the animal requires treatment.

**Updated Jul 25*