

## Home Poultry Flock Care

The economy and growing interest in more natural living is increasing the number of questions about home flocks. Some of you have been there in the past and might enjoy the article as a remainder of why you don't want to be involved any longer.

You don't need a fancy building to house a small poultry flock for family use. The housing area needs to have protection from predators, adequate ventilation, and sized for the number of birds in the flock, and ability to safely heat the area during cold winter weather. The house temperature range should 45 to 85 degrees. There should be vents to allow for fresh air to enter and vent moisture out, but these vents should not create drafts. Allow 2 square feet per bird for Leghorn type light layers and 3 square feet for heavier breeds. Smaller space creates crowding problems and larger spaces make it harder to maintain heat in the coop. Feeders and waterers should be one foot off the floor with adequate space and volume for the size of flock. A nest box should be available for every four layers. Additional roosts with eight inches per hen should be placed 16 to 24 inches above the floor.

Lights are necessary for good egg production in the winter months. A single 40 watt bulb set 8 to 10 feet above the floor will provide enough light for 200 square feet. The pullets will need 12 hours of light increased 15 minutes per week until 16 hours per day is reached. Added light is needed in every month but June. It is best to use and all in all out system in bird selection. Purchase started pullets (young birds) which are 18 to 20 weeks of age. Pullets begin laying at about 20 weeks. The disease and insect cycle can be well controlled by cleaning thoroughly when all birds have been removed and starting with all fresh birds. If you want to start with baby chicks, you will need a separate brooding and pullet raising shed. Hens will lay for 14-16 months, at which time the decision will need to be made if the flock will be molted and returned to production or harvested before starting again with pullets. Forced molting causes the hens to stop laying and then the hens resume laying about seven to eight weeks later. The will peak in production from 5 to 10 percent below their original production level.

Outside runs for the birds are useful for exercise and natural feeding. These areas as well as the poultry house need to be secure from predators like dogs, cats, raccoons, owls, fox, bobcat, hawks, weasels coyotes, and other predators. Leaving birds in outside areas on summer evenings is an open invitation to owl predation unless the area is covered. A good foundation and concrete floor including footings is best to reduce predator and rodent problems.

Eggs need to be gathered at least twice each day. They should be cleaned or washed as necessary and refrigerated to 50 degrees or lower temperature as soon as possible.

It is best to feed commercial layer ration. Young birds in particular are quite susceptible to nutritional problems when the diet is not balanced. With complete feed there is no need to feed grit or oyster shell. Supplement sparingly with open range with insects and grass, it is best to not feed whole grains. Never feed garbage as this adds considerable more risk.

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