

Advice on Caring for Chicks

CARING for and feeding chicks is not a difficult process when once the fundamentals are learned. There are many different methods of caring for and successfully raising chicks. In fact, nearly as many as there are chick raisers.

First of all, if we wish to raise a good percentage of the chicks hatched, we must have healthy, vigorous chicks to start with. We cannot expect to hatch a good percentage of poor, weakly chicks. To get these big, husky fellows we must look back and see what the parent stock was that laid the eggs from which these chicks were hatched. Unless the parent stock is healthy and vigorous, we cannot expect to hatch strong, vigorous chicks, no matter what methods of incubation we may follow.

Never use pullets as breeders, as they will not produce as strong chicks as will yearling or two-year old hens. The proper method of feeding and housing must also be taken into consideration.

As for proper methods of feeding, as far as our experience is concerned, we advise keeping a good dry mash before them at all times, composed of cornmeal, middlings, wheat bran, and 10 per cent meat scraps. Avoid feeding wet mashes, if you want strongly fertilized eggs. Keep a good supply of grit, shells and charcoal before them at all times. Give the breeders plenty of out door exercise, and on cold or stormy days, when confined to the house, throw their grain in six or eight inches of good clean litter, so they can warm up by exercising in scratching for it. Plenty of good, clean water should always be within reach.

I do not believe there is any one of practical experience who would not recommend the fresh-air or open-front house. I have learned from my own experience that fresh air methods means healthier and stronger fowls.

Eggs intended for hatching purposes should be carefully handled and never exposed to heat or cold. In selecting eggs for hatching always use those of medium size. The extremely large ones generally produce cripples while the small ones produce weaklings, as a rule. As regards setting a hen, this we consider a very simple matter and we believe everyone, or nearly everyone, can set a hen all right, but a few hints may be of use to some one. Put the nest on the ground, so that the hen can easily get on and off. Put a shovel of dirt in bottom of box and then put fine straw on top of this. If in winter it is well to first line the box with paper to keep out the draughts. Sprinkle nest and hen with good lice powder to rid both of lice. Do not give more eggs than she can cover nicely, which is usually from 11 to 15 eggs, depending on size of hen and weather conditions. Provide a dust bath for the sitting hens and feed plenty of whole corn. Dust them again about the eighteenth day with sulphur or good lice powder.

As for running an incubator, the best advice we can give is to follow the manufacturer's directions to the letter. The man who makes the incubator knows, or ought to know, just how his machine should be run to give best results, so it is needless for us to offer any suggestions. But don't always blame the machine for poor hatches. First be sure you have done your part. Experience with incubators is the best teacher.

After the chicks arrive, do not be in a hurry to feed them, but give them all the water they wish to drink. Many people want to be kind to their chicks and feed them too soon after hatching. This early feeding probably causes more chick disorders and loss than anything we know of. After the chicks are about 60 hours old, we give them all the beef scraps and dry bran they can eat for the first two days and nothing else but grit.

After the second day we feed them the following: two parts finely cracked corn, one part cracked

wheat, one part mixed millet seeds. This ration is fed until the chicks are five weeks old. After that we feed them a grain mixture of two parts whole wheat, one part cracked corn, and one part buckwheat. We also have dry bran and beef scraps in hoppers and let them have access to it at all times. Green food is absolutely necessary to keep them in condition. During the early spring, before any grass can be had, we feed sprouted oats, which is greatly relished by both chicks and old fowls.

After the chicks are old enough to sit on a roost we let them run together and roost in one large roosting room which is usually a part of the large laying house. At this time we feed them grain in six inches of good, clean litter and in this manner induce exercise, which means strong, vigorous pullets.

Keep the chicks and fowls free from lice, as lice are the chicks greatest enemy. Dust them at least once a week with a good powder, especially in hot weather. When the chickens are about six weeks old, cull out the least promising specimens and prepare them for market by placing them in an enclosure, slightly darkened and feed all the corn and buckwheat they will eat for a week or two, not neglecting water and grit.—D. W. Gooding.

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