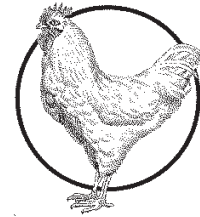




Small Flock Poultry Management Series



Brooding Chicks

Starting your chicks

Raising a flock of chickens for home meat or egg production can be an easy and rewarding experience. Before you jump into raising a flock of chickens there are a few things you should be aware of in order to have a healthy and productive flock.

Day old chicks are available from the local feed stores and from hatcheries around the country. Chicks are shipped by US Mail directly to your local post office or to the feed store where you can pick up those you have ordered. In order to keep the chicks healthy you need to be prepared to care for your chicks in advance of them arriving at your home.

Newly hatched chicks can not control their body temperature. It is essential that they have a source of heat. A brooder is used to keep the chicks warm during this crucial time. A simple brooder consists of an infra-red heat lamp; with a hood over it to direct heat toward the floor, and a brooder guard, a cardboard or wire mesh ring to keep the chicks confined to an area near the heat source.

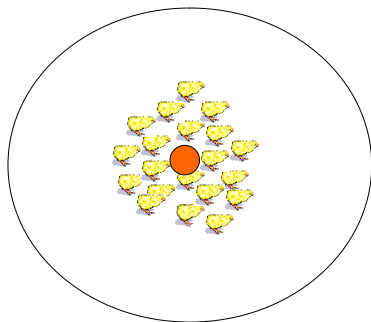
A heat lamp will keep the temperature within the ideal range of 90- 95 degrees for the first week. Measure the temperature 2.5 inches from the top of the litter directly below the hood. Make sure there is enough space for the chicks under the light without crowding or smothering and that there is enough space in the pen so that all of the chicks can escape from the heat. Each week you should decrease the temperature by 5 degrees. This can be easily accomplished by raising the height of the lamp. Set up and test your brooder at least one day before your chicks arrive.

Brooder Safety

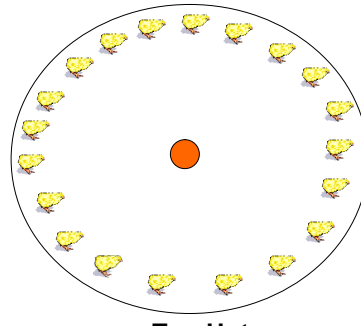
1. Do not hang the lamp by the cord, a chain will provide strong and safe suspension
2. Be sure that the lamp does not get close enough to catch the bedding on fire
3. Protect the bulb from splashing water (water splashed on the hot bulb will shatter it);
Where possible use a 'Hard Glass' bulb



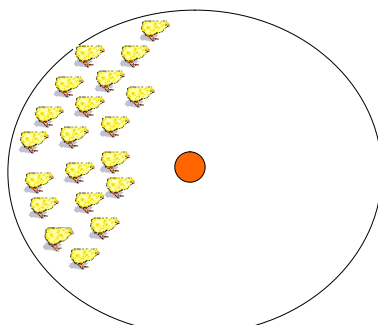
In the absence of a thermometer, monitoring chick behavior can help you determine if the temperature in the brooder is suitable for proper chick health. Chicks that are cold will huddle together under the heat lamp. Chicks that are too warm will move as far from the lamp as the brooder ring will allow. If the brooder area is drafty, the chicks will move to one side of the brooder in an attempt to escape the draft and still keep warm. If the temperature is just right the chicks will be evenly distributed within the brooder area.



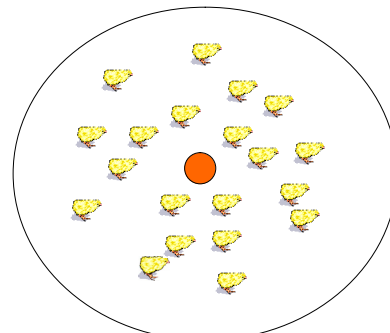
Too Cold



Too Hot



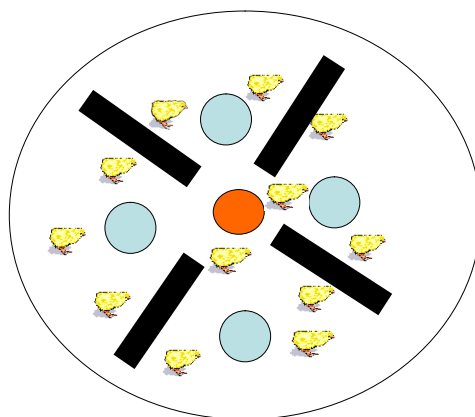
Drafty



Just Right

Litter is placed on the floor to absorb moisture; almost any material may be used with wood shavings and sawdust being most common. Newspaper should be placed over the bedding for the first few days to keep the chicks from eating the bedding. Do not use shiny color printed newspaper as the slippery surface may lead to leg damage. The brooder guard can be removed after one week; the brooder can be removed after the temperature under the brooder is in the 65 to 70 degree range or when the brooder and outside temperature match.

Provide enough space at the feed and water to allow all chicks to eat or drink at the same time. Feed and water should be placed around the brooder like spokes of a wheel, make sure your new chicks drink water immediately and spread a little feed on the newspaper until they start to eat from the feeders.



Feed and Water

Getting your chicks off to a good start will keep them happy, healthy and productive.

*Fact sheet by Tina Savage, UNH Cooperative Extension Agricultural Resources Educator
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