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# Raising Broilers

Broilers are young chickens specially bred for fast growth and slaughtered when they weigh about four pounds, usually between seven and nine weeks of age. Birds slaughtered between 12 and 20 weeks of age, typically weighing between five and 10 pounds are called *roasters*.

It's possible to enjoy a continuous supply of broilers by starting a new flock of chicks when the previous flock is a month old and slaughtering one-quarter of each flock at seven, eight, nine and 10 weeks of age.\*

## **Housing**

Start chicks off indoors in a cardboard box or boxes that provide one square foot of floor space per bird for the first month and two square feet per bird the second month.

Provide a litter of shavings or sawdust two or three inches deep. Cover the litter with newspaper for the first couple of days so the chicks will not become litter-eaters. Do not create roosts or hard places for the birds to roost since they may develop breast blisters and crooked breast bones. Wet and hard-packed litter also may result in breast blisters. Remove wet, caked litter often, replenishing it with fresh material.

Chicks need a temperature of 90°- 95° F at chick level; an infrared bulb suspended by a chain (not the cord) works well as a heat source. Don't guess – use a thermometer.

Remember that chicks also need room to get away from the heat. If you are going to use a cardboard box for the first few weeks, keep your heat source near one end or corner of each box. Drop the temperature five degrees each week.

## **Feeding and Watering**

To be successful raising broilers, use a broiler feed specially developed to meet their requirements for rapid growth. Call the feed supplier two weeks before your chicks arrive, because many feed dealers do not keep broiler feeds on hand and need time to order. A 100-lb. bag of broiler starter is enough to start 25 broiler chicks. After this is finished, change to broiler grower or finisher.

Feed and water should be ready in the chick pen when the chicks arrive. The bottom halves of egg cartons make good feeders for the first two or three days; after that, switch to metal or wooden trough feeders.

It is important that the chicks drink as soon as you get them – they can eat later. Use a chick

waterer in the beginning. Chicks may get wet enough in an open dish to get chilled and die. During the summer, it is helpful to have a 7-watt night light in your broiler house. Your birds may feel more like eating and drinking while it is cool at night. On extremely hot days, you may save a few birds by having a small fan blowing on them.

As your birds grow, use larger feeders and waterers. Deep feed troughs help to prevent waste as long as you don't overflow with feed. Water is cheap and essential. Never let birds go dry. Cool drinking water during very hot days allows the birds to stand the heat better.

For best growth, broilers should not be let outdoors in a large yard. They will use up energy in running around instead of gaining weight. Broilers should not be kept beyond 12 weeks of age. They will begin to eat more than they gain and the meat may become tougher. At this age, they will be large roasting chickens.

Consult local zoning and building ordinances before beginning any household livestock operation. Laws and ordinances in some communities may prohibit or restrict such activities in your neighborhood.

Also, consider the impact of your home poultry operation on your neighbors. Use care in siting and constructing housing for your chickens and develop a plan for manure management that will prevent odor and pollution problems.

***\* For a comprehensive online guide to home poultry slaughter, visit this University of Minnesota Extension Web site:***

**<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/livestocksystems/DI0701.html>**

*Original fact sheet written by Tom Danko, retired Extension Poultry Specialist; revision reviewed by Danko 8/00*

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