

# Raising Broilers

Broilers are young chickens specially bred for fast growth and slaughtered when they weigh about 5 pounds, usually between 7 and 9 weeks of age. Birds slaughtered between 7 and 12 weeks of age, typically weigh between 7 and 10 lbs. and 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 by slaughtering one-quarter of each flock at seven, eight, nine and 10 weeks of age.

## Housing

Start chicks indoors in a deep container (at least 30 inches deep) that supplies one square foot of floor space per bird. If the container is square, round corners to prevent chick piling and death. The chicks will require this amount of floor space for approximately 1 month at which time the space should be increased to 2 square feet per bird.

Spread an absorbent litter on the floor of the box that is not small enough to be mistaken for food. If newspaper is used as bedding, sprinkled it with a thin layer of sterile sand or leg splaying can occur.

Replace wet soiled bedding/litter often to keep chicks clean and dry.

Chicks cannot self-regulate their body temperature until they are 14 days old. This means that in their first few weeks of life they are extremely sensitive to variations in temperature and that they are easily overheated or chilled. Maintain a temperature at chick level of approximately 90 to 95 degrees F. Don't guess! Use a thermometer. An infrared bulb securely suspended from above that can be lowered or heightened as needed to regulate the temperature should be used. Incandescent lights in can also be use. *REMEMBER that these heat sources can cause fires so take proper precautions to keep your family and animals safe.* Drop the temperature 5 degrees per week until you reach 70 degrees at which time birds should be fledged. At this time lights are no longer needed and can be turned off at night (approximately 5 weeks depending on the season of the year. Contact your local extension for more information).

## **Feeding and Watering**

The most important nutrient to provide new chicks with is water. Just before hatching, chicks absorb the rest of the egg yolk in their egg which will sustain them for approximately 3 days. Therefore making sure water is in place in the brooder for when the chicks arrive is more important than having food available. Use a chick waterer (available in feed stores). As each bird goes into the brooder, dip the beak into the water so they can get a small drink and hopefully learn where the water source is. Placing colored glass marbles in the trough can encourage chicks to peck at the water and learn to drink from it. Monitor the birds carefully at first and when you believe all have learned to drink, then you can put the food in the brooder (no later than the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> day). These steps can prevent chicks from getting pasting by prevent the birds from filling up on feed and not going to water like they should. Without water in their system, they cannot correctly digest their food, which leads to pasting. *Incorrect brooder temperatures is also another factor that can lead to pasting.*

To be successful raising broilers, use medicated chick starter when you get the chicks home (100lbs of starter is enough to start 25 broiler chicks). After 2 weeks birds can go on broiler grower and at no less than 42 days birds can go on finisher.

Open containers like cardboard egg cartons can be used to supply food for the first three or four days but these open containers should be switched to limited access containers to prevent chicks from standing in feed and defecating in it. Proper chick feeders are readily available at feed stores.

Food and water should be available to broilers constantly until slaughter because of the rapid growth rate these birds. Even pasture birds should be supplied with free choice rations and water. Pasture should only be used as a supplement to balanced rations, not a main diet.

### **A final note:**

Consult your local zoning and building ordinances before beginning any household livestock operation. Laws and ordinances in some communities (even rural communities) may prohibit or restrict such activities in your neighborhood, regardless of land mass. One should also consider the impact of your home livestock operation on your neighbors. Use care in siting and construction of housing for your animals and develop a plan for manure management that will prevent odor and environmental problems.

*Original fact sheet written by Tom Danko, retired Extension Poultry Specialist. Revised January, 2015 by Dorothy Perkins UNHCE Field Specialist-Dairy, Livestock and Forages Team.*

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