

This sample chapter is taken from Robert Plamondon's book, *Success With Baby Chicks*, Published by Norton Creek Press, 2003. ISBN 0972177000. Retail price \$13.95.

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Chapter 2. Brooding Quick-Start

2.1. Before Ordering the Chicks

2.1.1. *Prepare the Brooder House*

1. If you don't already have a brooder house, make one or adapt an existing structure. See Chapter 14.
2. Clear away any brush or trash that may have accumulated around the brooder house.
3. Examine the brooder house for leaks in the roof, gaps in the floor, and rat holes—and fix them.
4. If there are signs of rats, trap or poison them now.
5. If there is an infestation of roost mites or other noxious bugs, treat the brooder house now. See Chapter 15.
6. If there is old litter in the house, decide whether you are going to re-use it. If so, prepare it as described in Chapter 13. Otherwise, remove the old litter and put in new.

7. Acquire a brooder, draft guard, first feeders, and first waterers. See Chapter 5.
8. Dump any feed left over from last time.
9. Close up the brooder house by closing all the windows and covering any sizable openings with tarps, sheets of plastic, or plastic feed sacks.

DANGER! If you are using vent-free propane brooders, it is possible for carbon monoxide to build up to lethal levels in a tightly closed brooder house. Install a carbon monoxide alarm if you're going to use propane brooders in a tight house.

2.1.2. Management Decisions

1. Did you have high mortality, a wet house, caked litter, cannibalism, or coccidiosis last time? Consider brooding fewer chicks per house this time.
2. Plan out your brooding season.
3. Select a hatchery. See Chapter 3.
4. Consider trying a new breed by placing an order that consists of your favorite breed plus one that might be a contender, so you can raise them together and see which one you like best. Sometimes you can become a lot happier with poultrykeeping just by switching to a breed that suits you better.
5. Did your feeders or waterers frequently go empty? Did your waterers cause you trouble? Was there feed spillage? Are you happy with your brooder? Is there mud in front of your brooder house? Do you have a conveniently placed trash can? Does the water piping to the brooder house pass muster? Does the wiring to your brooder house make you nervous? Is your brooder house permeable to rodents, pets, or predators? Now's the time to make changes.
6. Is it time to build another brooder house or acquire some battery brooders?
7. Do you have enough housing for the chicks after they leave the brooder house?

2.2. Ordering the Chicks

1. Write down the expected date of arrival and be sure a phone call from the post office will reach you.
2. While you're at it, write down the type of chicks ordered and the hatchery they were ordered from. If you've been considering more than one breed or more than one hatchery, it's easy get lose track of what you really ordered.

2.3. Before the Chicks Arrive

1. If this is the first batch of the season, start the brooder several days before the chicks are due to arrive to make sure it still works. Otherwise, start it at least 24 hours in advance.
2. Buy feed. See Chapter 11.
3. Buy or make feeders and waterers. See Chapters 11 and 12.
4. Check the temperature under the brooder to make sure everything is okay. Do this enough in advance that you can do whatever it takes to keep from being chilled after they arrive.
5. The floor under the brooder must be warm and dry to the touch before the chicks arrive. This is very important.
6. Install a draft guard, 10-18 inches high, around the brooder, with 2-3 feet of space between the edge of the brooder and the draft guard.
7. Make sure there's plenty of light for the chicks to see by. They can't eat or drink in the dark.
8. Clean your quart-jar waterers and (if they are reusable) your first feeders. See Figure 1.
9. Clean, inspect, and repair your automatic watering system (if any), feed troughs, tube feeders, "practice perches," waterer stands, and other equipment that will be brought into use as the chicks get older.
10. Double-check that your brooder is set up for day-old chicks, and has not been left the way it was the last time it was used, throttled back for older chicks who barely needed any heat.



Figure 1. A brooder area ready for the chicks. Box lids are set out as temporary feeders. Quart-jar waterers on set up on little wooden frames covered with hardware cloth. (This photo, and others in the sequence are from Rice & Botsford's Practical Poultry Management, Sixth Ed., 1956, pp. 3-10)

2.4. When the Chicks Arrive

1. If you fetch the chicks from the Post Office, run the heater in your car to keep them warm on the drive home if the weather is cool. If it's warm, keep the chick box out of the sun.
2. Place the chicks under the brooder without delay. Don't leave the brooder house door open any more than absolutely necessary. Commercial chicken farmers simply turn the chick boxes upside down to dump the chicks under the brooders. This doesn't harm them, and gets them where it's warm with a minimum of delay.
3. Give the chicks warm water to drink immediately in quart-jar waterers, with at least one waterer for every 25 chicks. One waterer per 15 chicks is better. After chilling, dehydration is your biggest worry.
4. Give the chicks feed in the first feeders either immediately or after three hours (opinions vary). The 3-hour delay is intended

to get the dehydration problem taken care of before the issue becomes complicated by feed. First feeders can be egg flats (1 for every 50 chicks), plastic cafeteria trays (1 for every 50 chicks), or the lid or bottom of the box the chicks arrived in.

2.5. Days 1-2

1. Don't let the chicks get chilled. Check on the chicks several times per day. Move any that get lost back into the heat. Make sure they are warm enough. Make a special trip at nightfall to make sure all the chicks make it back under the brooder. Also check first thing in the morning to make sure they're warm enough.
2. Spend time with the chicks. This is vitally important at all ages. If you deal with the chicks hurriedly or mechanically, all the fun goes out of poultrykeeping. Also, when things start to go wrong, you won't notice. Take a few extra minutes each time you're in the brooder house.
3. Leave the lights on all night so the chicks can see to eat and drink. It's not time to put them on a day/night cycle yet.
4. Refill the waterers and feeders as necessary. The chicks will kick feed out of the first feeders, and it will be lost. Don't try to prevent this.
5. Each time you visit the brooder house, check under the brooder for sick or dead chicks. Dead chicks need to be removed immediately. Some first-week mortality is normal. The amount of it depends on the amount of stress the chicks underwent during shipping and the amount of stress in the brooder house. The highest mortality will almost always be in the first 48 hours. It should cease, or almost cease, after that.

2.6. Days 3-4

1. Check on the chicks at least twice per day. Take your time.
2. Keep in mind that chickens are easily stressed by sudden changes in routine. Changes must be made gradually.
3. Expand the draft guard to give the chicks more space and to make room for more equipment.

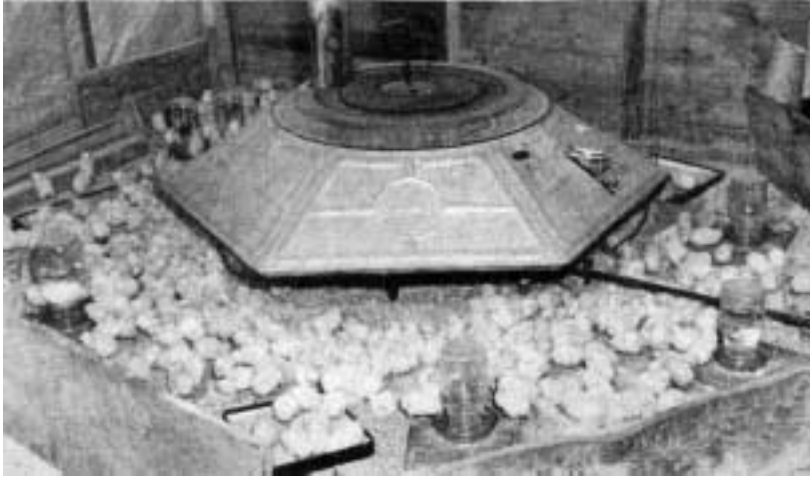


Figure 2. Day 1.

4. Add larger feeders, either chick troughs or small (15 lb.) hanging tube feeders. Tube feeders should start with their feed pans flat on the ground. Troughs should be filled to the top. Use eight feet of chick trough per 100 chicks (two 4-foot troughs, four two-foot troughs, or eight one-foot troughs), arranged so the chicks can feed from both sides, or two tube feeder for every 100 chicks. Keep using the first feeders.
5. Add larger waterers, either chick founts (which come in 1-, 3-, and 5-gallon sizes, 1 gallon per 50 chicks) or automatic waterers. These should be on stands that keep them above the floor and prevent litter from getting in the water. The waterers should be adjusted on the high side, so the chicks have to stretch a little to get the water. This will prevent them from splashing in it and getting chilled. See Chapter 12. Don't remove any of the quart-jar waterers yet.
6. Discontinue all-night lights after three nights.

2.7. Days 5-10

1. Expand the draft guard again on Day 5. If the chicks are getting past it, or the house is so small practically all of it is inside the draft guard already, remove it.



Figure 3. Day 3. The draft guard has been expanded and trough feeders have been installed (these days, tube feeders are more popular). Box feeders are still used.

2. Remove the quart-jar waterers gradually, one or two per day, until only the large-capacity or automatic waterers remain. Keep an eye on the chicks; sometimes it takes longer for them to use the big waterers, and you'll have to hold off removing the small ones.
3. Remove the first feeders gradually, one or two per day, until only the trough or tube feeders remain.
4. If tube feeders are used, check their height each day, adjusting them so the chicks are neither straining up nor reaching down to eat.
5. If trough feeders are used, fill them a little less full day by day, because a full trough leads to a great deal of feed wastage.
6. If overhead heat-lamp brooders are used, raise them a couple of inches higher at the end of the first week. If insulated heat lamp brooders are used, reduce the wattage of the bulbs at the end of the first week if the chicks seem comfortable. Turn down thermostatically controlled brooders by 5 °F.
7. By the end of the first week, mortality should have ceased altogether. If not see Chapter 15.



Figure 4. The same chicks during week 2. They have been given more space and larger waterers on wire stands.

2.8. Day 11

1. Double the amount of feeder space. If using trough feeders, it may be time to replace them with ones designed for larger chicks. This will reduce feed wastage. Continue increasing the height of the feeders as the chicks grow.

2.9. Remainder of Second Week

1. Pay attention to litter quality. Caked litter tends to appear around the brooder at this time, and wet litter tends to appear around the waterers. Remove both as they appear. See Chapter 13.
2. Start increasing ventilation a little at a time.
3. At the end of the second week (Day 14), turn down the thermostat another five degrees, raise overhead infrared heaters

two inches, or raise insulated heat-lamp brooders an inch or two—whichever is appropriate to your brooder.

2.10. Third Week

1. Except for broilers, add some “practice perches” to encourage early roosting.
2. Turn the thermostat down or raise the brooder again, as appropriate.
3. Increase ventilation some more.
4. Keep checking the brooder house twice daily. It’s easy to fall out of the habit because this period is generally trouble-free.



Figure 5. Chicks sleeping at night. Their heat needs have gone down, and the space under the brooder has become too warm for comfort, so they sleep just outside.

2.11. Weeks 4-5

These are the last weeks of the brooding period. Depending on the weather, broilers may not need brooder heat after two weeks, Leghorns after three, and other breeds after four. But be prepared to give brooder heat to broilers for three weeks and other breeds for five. Add an additional week if you are brooding in winter.

The birds get quite large during this period, and a brooder house that was fine yesterday can be crowded today. Crowding can lead to sudden outbreaks of coccidiosis (a protozoan infection), feather-picking, and even cannibalism. It is very important to have enough floor space to keep the birds happy and healthy for the entire brooding period. This is easy if they are being brooded in the same house in which they will live throughout their lives, but if they are to be moved to different quarters, they need to be moved on time. Delay can be disastrous.

At the end of the brooding period, the feeders need to be swapped for larger ones that are suitable for adult birds, and (except for broilers) full-sized perches installed. For hens, nest boxes will be needed by Week 18 for commercial layers, or Week 20 for other breeds.



Figure 6. As the chicks grow, they need a lot more space. Note that the original troughs have been replaced with larger ones.



Figure 7. As these pullets approach laying age, they are given still larger feed troughs, this time set up on stands to make them easier to fill. That makes three sets of troughs, two of which are used during the brooding period.