



# The Basics of: Brooding Poultry

Small Flock Research and Innovation Laboratory  
Brigid McCrea, Poultry Specialist, 302-857-6432

## Brooding Container and Site

When brooding poultry, your choice of container will be influenced by the species you are raising. The simplest container for chicks or other poultry is a cardboard box. They are often free and can be discarded after brooding. Wooden brooders are durable but have the drawback of being difficult to clean and disinfect. Other options include brooding in a plastic tub or perhaps in an enclosure outside (if you are able to provide supplemental heat).

Waterfowl (ducklings and goslings) tend to be very messy with their watering devices. This makes for a messy brooder box that will re-

quire frequent cleaning. You may wish to choose a brooding box that is made out of plastic to make sure the bottom of the container does not soak through to the floor.

Most poultry owners provide an area for brooding baby poultry indoors for several weeks before moving birds to the outdoors. Choose your brooding area with care. Avoid drafty areas near frequently used doors or heater/air conditioning vents. Drafts will chill baby poultry. Once chilled, then you may have birds that never reach their full potential. Do not place chicks in direct sunlight as the temperature may

become too hot. Use caution when placing the brooding box near water bowls (i.e., pet dishes). Soon enough chicks will learn to fly and may land in a water dish and drown before you can retrieve them. Put wire mesh (chicken coop wire or an old window screen) on top of the brooding box after 2-3 weeks of brooding to alleviate this problem.

Make sure you have a safe area for your chicks. House cats and some dogs may become overly interested when the brooder contains baby poultry.



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## How to Heat your Brooder

Use a brooder lamp and brooder lamp bulb (125 or 250 watts) to keep chicks warm. Suspend the brooder lamp so that it is approximately 18 inches from the litter material (shavings). A regular 60 watt bulb in a desk lamp may serve your needs for a small group of chicks. The height of the desk

lamp may also be closer to the chicks to maintain proper temperature. Do not let the bulb come in contact with any flammable materials (this includes the sides of a cardboard box). The brooder must be maintained at 95°F for the first week. Every week thereafter the temperature should be dropped

by 5°F. Keep a thermometer in the brooder at chick height. This will tell you exactly how warm the brooder is and takes the guesswork out of brooding!

Keep birds in the brooder until the temperature reaches 70°F. The birds should be fully feathered before being placed outside.

## Equipment Basics

Brooder  
Lamp  
Brooder Bulb  
Feeder  
Chick Feed  
Waterer  
Shavings

## Key Points

- ◆ *Clean and disinfect the brooder & equipment weekly*
- ◆ *Keep the brooder at 95°F for the first week.*
- ◆ *Drop the brooder temperature 5°F each week thereafter.*
- ◆ *Use a chick starter in mash or crumbles form for the first weeks.*
- ◆ *Always keep the feeder full.*
- ◆ *Change the water*

# Building Your Brooder

**Bedding:** Your brooder should contain a thick layer of a litter material on the bottom. Pine shavings are the most readily available and affordable choice at feed stores. Newspaper may be used underneath the shavings but is not a suitable substrate alone as it is too slick for baby poultry. Place 2 inches of litter in the brooder and then place your feeder and waterer.

**Waterer:** You will need a 1 qt. waterer for 25 chicks for the first 2 weeks, then switch to a gallon-sized waterer. If too deep, place marbles in the drinking area of the chick

waterer to prevent chicks from drowning. Quail, and other gamebirds, should have a quart-sized waterer that has a much narrower base to prevent these smaller chicks from drowning. These are called quail waterers and are suitable for use with chicks, poults, or keets. Baby waterfowl tend to play in their waterers so waterers should be on a raised, screened platform. Waterfowl need a waterer that is at least 1.5 inches in width to allow them to submerge their bill and drink. Always give fresh, cool water daily.

**Feeder:** You will need to provide a feeder with a top. Many species of poultry have a tendency to dust bathe in the feed, thereby causing waste. Another bad habit is scratching or “billing” (scooping out using the beak) out the feed onto the ground. You will need 1 in. of feeder space per bird for the first 2 weeks, then increase the space to 2 in. at 4-6 weeks, and 4 in. at over 6 weeks of age. Space requirements for waterfowl follow those for chicks. Poults require 2 in. per bird from 0-4 weeks, 4 in./bird from 4-8 weeks, and 6 in./bird at over 8 weeks.

# What to Feed Baby Poultry

Baby poultry should begin with a starter that is either in mash (fine powder) or crumble (pellets that are broken into small pieces) form. Rapidly growing poultry need a balanced diet; give a feed formulated for the species of poultry that you are raising. Scratch grains are fine for supplemental feeding of free range birds or for cold weather supplemental feeding, but are not formulated to meet the nutritional requirements of poultry. Medicated feeds contain a low level of coccistat. This enables the chicks to develop an immunity to a parasite

that causes Coccidiosis by 6-8 weeks of age. They are then protected for the remainder of the

**Coccidiosis can be a problem in areas that have housed chickens in the past or in intensive rearing conditions.**

growing and laying period. Baby waterfowl can have an adverse reactions to some medications, however coccidostats can be fed to water-

fowl. Read the label on your feed bag to make sure the feed you are feeding is safe for the type of poultry you are raising. Baby waterfowl can choke on mash and can waste up to 25% of their feed if it is in mash form. Any feed changes (i.e., mash to crumbles or crumbles to pellets) should be done gradually over the course of a week. Grit does not need to be fed immediately to chicks until they are moved outdoors or given whole grains in the diet.

# Cleaning the Brooder

Unless you are using a disposable brooder box (i.e., cardboard), it is best to clean before and after each set of chicks that arrive. Cleaning is simple; just wash out the brooder with warm, soapy water and then allow it to dry thoroughly. Then spray the inside of the brooder with a disinfectant such as Lysol. Instead of Lysol, you can also use 1 teaspoon of bleach into a gallon of water (allow 10 min. of contact time

before rinsing, then dry). Feeders and waterers should be cleaned with soap and water, followed by disinfection with a bleach solution, on a weekly basis. The brooder bedding should be cleaned and changed weekly when chicks are young. Depending on the number of chicks you have, you may need to change the litter more frequently as the birds age.

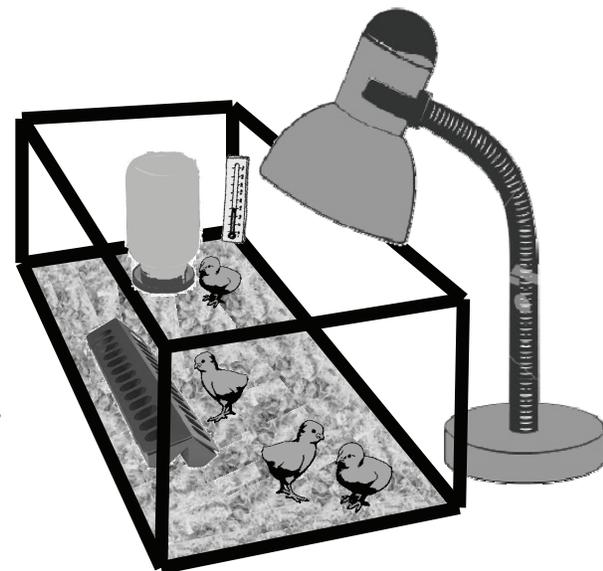


Diagram of a brooder box with lamp, feeder, waterer, bedding, and thermometer.