

TRAVELING HOME

Keep the chicks in the box and secure on a flat surface so they won't slide if the vehicle comes to a sudden stop. If it is cold outside, keep the heater going inside the vehicle.

ONCE AT HOME

Set up a brooding area. When raising just a few chicks (30 or less), use a large box with walls at least 18 inches high and place the box in a safe area away from drafts and household pets. Use a screen or a towel to cover the box. Be sure any flammable component of your brooder is a safe distance from your heat source. For larger numbers, a metal stock tank can be used in an enclosed, draft-free outbuilding. Do not use a plastic bin as a brooding area. The brooder lamp can melt the plastic, fall into the pine shavings and start a fire. Chicks need one-half square foot of space for the first two weeks. But they grow fast, so you will need to expand the area as they grow. After two weeks, increase to one square foot per bird.

KEEPING THEM WARM

Chicks need to be kept in a warm place until they are fully feathered. The temperature at the bottom of the brooding area should be 90-95 degrees for the first two weeks, and then reduced five degrees each week until chicks are a month old. Use a brooder lamp (we recommend a red bulb) clipped over one side of the brooding area so the chicks can choose whether to be under the light or not. If chicks are crowded together directly under the heat source, then they are cold. If they are around the edges of the brooding area, then they are too hot. Adjust the height of the lamp accordingly and give them enough room to move in and out of the light to regulate their body temperatures.



BEDDING

Provide bedding to catch and absorb chick droppings and change this daily. This also prevents the surface from being too slippery for the chicks. Without proper footing, their legs will not develop correctly, making them spraddle-legged. We recommend lining the floor of the box with sheets of newspaper first to make cleaning easy. Then add 2"-3" of pine shavings, chopped straw, oat hulls, or coarse ground cobs. Once soiled either scoop away old bedding or roll up the newspaper, bedding, and all, then compost or throw away.

FOOD AND WATER

Set out water and chick starter feed in separate containers. Keep both food and water clean and free of droppings. The typical one-gallon chick fountain should be adequate for up to 50 chicks, and the typical chick feeder for up to 25 chicks. If chicks are not drinking, dip their beaks in the water to get them started. A chick fountain is by far the best way to give chicks water. Saucers or other makeshift containers spill easily, making the brooding area wet and unsanitary. Never let the chicks go without water. For feed, start chicks on a 20% protein (24% protein for broilers) starter ration. At 8-10 weeks old, switch chicks to 18-19% protein chick grower.

ODDS AND ENDS

Chicks love to roost when they're resting. Provide roosting poles or stacks of bricks so chicks have a place to perch a few inches off the ground to keep them from roosting on the water source and feeder. As the chicks start to feather, on warm days put them in a wire pen outside for short periods of time in a draft-free area. Keep an eye on them and provide a tray of sand so they can dust. As you work with the chicks, remember that slow movements are less apt to frighten them.