

Feathered Facts

Volume 3, Issue 9

September 2016

UF/IFAS Extension Baker County

Common Questions about Poultry

- Please send comments or questions to baker@ifas.ufl.edu
- Archives of past issues can be found [here](#).
- Email announcements of official UF | IFAS poultry programs to baker@ifas.ufl.edu
- [UF/IFAS Small Farms Poultry Web Page](#)

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Over the past few years, I have conducted many Poultry Workshops across the state of Florida, with topics including: breeds, management, nutrition, pests, predators, and rules governing the sale of poultry and eggs. Over this course of time, there are many questions asked during and after the presentations and I want to take the time to answer a few of these. Please remember that if you have questions regarding poultry and/or egg production, please do not hesitate to contact me via the information on page 4 and I will be glad to help.

Sincerely,




Michael A. Davis, Ph.D.
UF/IFAS Extension Baker County



Common Questions about Poultry

Starting Chicks

- One of the most common questions that I get during poultry workshops is “What are the chicks going to need?”. My answer to this is always **BE PREPARED** for just about anything. Chicks need just a few things for them to be healthy once they get to your house and those include:
 - A clean environment
 - Protection from the heat, cold, and predators.
 - Proper ventilation
 - Access to fresh water and clean food
 - A proper bedding material.

Once you have taken care of the list above, you are ready to have the chicks at your door. Remember that young chicks need extra heat as they cannot regulate their body temperature well. The most common heat setting for your brooding area should be at 95F for the first week and you can decrease up to 5F per week following.

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Common Questions about Poultry

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Starting Chicks



Chicks that are bunched up are indicative of a cold environment.

- Another common issue is that the chicks are making a mess of the feed and water. This is common, especially for chicks that are less than a couple of weeks old. In general, use pan feeders and waterers that sit on the floor for at least the first week of life. You can then change to a different feeder type and raise the waterers. Feeders and waterers should be at the shoulder height of the birds. This will let them have access, but will limit the ability to make a mess. Remember that waterers should be cleaned and refilled daily.

• What about litter?

- Litter for the floor should be of a (relatively) soft material that is able to absorb liquids. Typically, pine shavings, rice hulls, or coarse sawdust are used. You will want to avoid fine sawdust, cedar, and newspaper.

- Once birds reach around 3 to 4 weeks old, or once they have lost most of their down, many folks want to let these birds roam around. This is perfectly fine as long as you remember that birds that are not fully feathered can tolerate being wet or a little cold, but they cannot tolerate both. If you are rearing your chicks in the summer, make sure to provide adequate shade.



Housing and Nest Boxes

Another common set of questions revolves around housing and nest boxes. These usually concern size, materials, etc.

- Regarding housing, as long as you are providing the essentials (see page 1), then housing for a flock can be almost anything. The birds don't need a lavish house as long as their needs are met.
- Each hen will also need about 8 inches of roost space within the enclosure. If you have a large breed of birds, you might want to increase this to around 12 inches.
- As for nest boxes, each box should be able to accommodate 4 to 5 hens. However, most flocks will have a broody or territorial hen that doesn't like to share. It is advisable to include at least one more nest box than you think that you'll actually need for such occasions (as you will not be able to teach the hen to share).
- In general, both roosts and nest boxes should be large enough to accommodate the hens and should be approximately 2 feet above the level of the floor in the enclosure.



Examples of housing for small flocks.

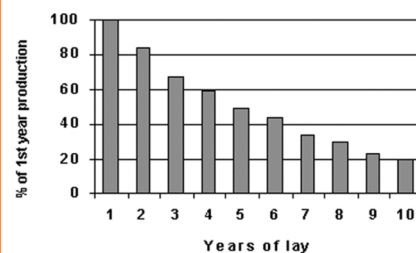
Common Questions about Poultry

Hens and Laying

- Since most people with small flocks are interested in getting eggs from these flocks, I typically receive a lot of questions concerning hens and laying.
 - Hens will begin to lay eggs when they are around 20 weeks of age, although some may be a bit sooner or later, depending on the breed.
 - Peak production in hens occurs around week 30 and lasts until around week 80. Over a span of time, this will be the most eggs that a hen lays in her lifetime. Early eggs may be small and on the floor.
 - Many small flock hens will average somewhere between 175 and 250 eggs during the peak production year.
 - Hens may stop laying eggs for a number of reasons, but the list below contains the most common reasons:
 - Decreasing day length—the reproductive system of the hen is stimulated by the amount of light she receives. When days start getting shorter, the hen will decrease egg production. Most hens will lay sporadically throughout the winter, but most likely not as high in numbers as they would in summer.
 - Unbalanced nutrition—a good, balanced diet is essential for the hen to produce eggs. If her diet is lacking, she will decrease egg production. This includes water in the diet as well.
 - Disease—disease problems can have an adverse effect on egg production. Unhealthy birds are not able to produce as many eggs as healthy birds.
 - Age—as hens age, they will produce fewer eggs. The graph below indicates the decreasing curve of egg production over time.
 - Stress—stress can come in many forms, including heat and overcrowding. One of the most common stressors that will cause a flock to stop laying for a short period of time is loud noises. Each year just after July 4 and just after January 1, I receive phone calls about hens not producing eggs. This is usually caused by stress from the loud noises of fireworks. After a few days, the hens will resume normal egg production.
- Since hens need around to 14 hours of light per day to stay in maximum production, many small flock owners will add supplemental lighting in the coop area for the hens. If you decide to do this, there are a few things to remember: 1) watch out for shadows—make sure that the light that you provide is fairly even across the enclosure, 2) don't give too much light—if you can stand in the coop at hen level and read by the light provided, it is enough to stimulate egg production, 3) the use of long fluorescent bulbs is not recommended as cold weather will adversely affect their performance (incandescent or “pigtail” fluorescent bulbs should work fine).



Examples of housing for small flocks.



Egg production in hens naturally decreases over time.

Common Questions about Poultry

Feeding and Nutrition

- Questions about feeding and nutrition are always common at poultry workshops. The information below will give you a bit of information about the nutrition of your flock.
- All animals must eat to meet two types of nutrient requirements: 1) maintenance and 2) production. The maintenance requirement is the amount of nutrition needed to keep the body functioning without any gain or loss of weight and to keep vital body processes such as heat, minimal movement, and the repair and replacement of cells functioning. Anything above this minimal requirement is considered a production requirement, such as growth and egg production.
- Poultry need nutrition that provides the following: 1) energy, 2) protein, 3) vitamins, 4) minerals, and 5) water.
- In general, poultry feed contains corn and fats to supply energy, soybean meal to provide protein (amino acids), minerals such as calcium and phosphorus, and vitamin premixes.
- Feeds may also contain pigments. One of the most common is xanthophylls. These are the pigments that give the yellow color to the shanks, feet, skin, and yolks of eggs. Corn contains some of these, but many feeds will add marigold extract to provide additional color, especially to yolks. The amount of these pigments do not affect the nutrition of the egg.
- Feeds may also contain non-nutritive ingredients, including:
 - Antibiotics—including antibiotics in the feed is a much less common practice than it used to be. Non-therapeutic levels of certain antibiotics are considered to be growth promoters. Many feeds that you find today will not include antibiotics.
 - Coccidiostats—coccidiostats are not antibiotics. However, they do prevent coccidiosis, which can be very damaging to young poultry. Even if you opt to use a feed without antibiotics for young chicks, you should always use a coccidiostat.

| Incandescent Bulb Wattage | Equivalent Lumens |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 40 | 450 |
| 60 | 800 |
| 75 | 1,100 |
| 100 | 1,600 |
| 150 | 2,600 |

The brightness, or intensity of an object that emits light is measured in lumens. Older, incandescent bulbs typically used wattage for this measurement. The table above gives the equivalent lumens for comparison to wattage. For additional information about this subject, click [here](#).

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