

Growing Broilers

To obtain the most economical amount of chicken meat, you need two things: (1) meat type broiler chicks and (2) broiler feed. Whether you order chicks through the mail or from a feed store, specify meat-type stock, such as Rock Cornish. Male chicks of this stock grow the fastest but both males and females make good broilers. Male chicks from table egg production types aren't good for meat. Even if you could get them free, they aren't worth it!

Feed and Water

Broiler feed has more protein, vitamins and energy than ordinary chick starter feed. Some feed companies now make only one broiler feed to be used from one day to slaughter age. You should check with your nearby store before you get your chicks to be sure they have some on hand. If broiler feed isn't available, regular chick starter is a second choice. Don't use regular growing feed – it will result in birds being one-half the size they should be.

It makes good sense to use feed that contains medication to control coccidiosis, a very common chicken intestinal disease. If your feed tag says to discontinue the medication a few days before slaughter, use any unmedicated chicken feed. As an aid in planning, 12 broilers will eat about 150 pounds of feed to seven weeks of age. At that age, they should weigh four pounds alive and dress out at three pounds.

The feed and water should be ready when your chicks arrive. Bottom halves of one-dozen egg boxes make good feeders for two to three days. At the same time, you can start training them to use feed troughs.

It's most important that chicks drink as soon as they arrive. Use a chick waterer – not an

open dish – in the beginning. Chicks may get wet enough in an open dish to get chilled and die.

It's often a good idea to buy a powdered vitamin-mineral mix to put in the drinking water from the first day of age until a packet good for 50 gallons is used up. These rapid growing birds have high needs for nutrients to develop strong legs.



The waterers should be cleaned once a day with a scrub brush. It's worth having the chickens eat all the feed from the feed troughs every second or third day so feed doesn't get stale. If you find the feeders or waterers getting filled with litter, put bricks, blocks of wood, or boards under them to raise them off the floor.

Temperature and Housing

You should have a temperature of 90-95° at chick level for the new arrivals. Don't guess, use a thermometer! Infrared heat lamps or light bulbs are the main sources of heat. While chicks need this much heat, they may also need room to get away from it.

If you decide to use a cardboard box for a week or two, keep the heat source near one end. Keep the bulbs away from anything flammable. The box should be at least 3' x 3' in size – 3' x 5' would be better. You can drop the temperature at least 5° each week.

Provide your chicks with one square foot of floor space per bird up to four weeks of age. Increase the space to two square feet per bird after this time. Remember to protect them from dogs, cats and wild animals. Rats can be particularly bad on baby chicks.

Bedding of sawdust or shavings two or more inches deep should be used. Hay shouldn't be used. You shouldn't need to change the bedding during the life of the flock unless you have a flood. It's a good idea to stir up the litter daily as the birds get older to keep the litter from crusting over. If you use sawdust for litter, cover it with newspapers for the first two days so the chicks can learn to eat feed instead of litter.

There should be no roosts, concrete blocks, rocks, or boards for the birds to sit on. Hard objects or wet, packed litter can cause breast blisters and crooked breast bones.

It's simplest to grow your birds completely indoors. If you are short of space and want to let them out in a small fenced yard daytimes, it's okay. Be sure to lock them in at night if there are wild animals around. During summertime growing, a shady yard would be better than a totally sunny yard.

Hot Weather Tips

During the summer, it is helpful to have a small night light on all night. Your birds may feel more like eating while it is cool at night. After the birds are four weeks old, they feel the effects of 90° heat quite severely. Keep a good supply of cool water in front of them. Water is cheap but very necessary! It may be helpful on very hot days to have a small fan blowing

directly on the birds. Broilers over four weeks of age sometimes die very suddenly of apparent heart attacks. It is best not to excite them in the midst of a hot day. If you should come upon the scene just when such a bird was kicking its last and you could still bleed the bird, it's very possible to salvage the bird for meat.

General Growing Suggestions

As your birds grow, use larger feeders and waterers. Deep feed troughs help to prevent waste as long as you don't over fill with feed. If you are using a round, hanging metal feeder, raise it off the floor and adjust it so that the feed isn't pouring out on the floor. Chicken feed makes very expensive litter!

If you want to raise your birds to roaster size, simply keep them longer. The ready-to-cook weight is about two-thirds of the live weight. It's not generally worth keeping them beyond 12 weeks of age. They'll be very heavy by then and will be eating too much for what they gain.

There should be no need for vaccinations or antibiotics except for the cocci medication mentioned earlier. Broilers don't usually need to have their beaks trimmed and they're not bothered by external parasites such as lice and mites.

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