

Your Chicks' Week 6

You made it through the brooding period...congratulations! This is the most labor intensive part of starting a poultry flock! Between 6 and 8 weeks of age, your chicks will be much larger and will need twice the amount of floor space they started with. If the temperature is mild and the chicks are fully feathered, they can be allowed outside during the day. It's also time to start thinking about moving your chicks from the brooder to more permanent living quarters outside.

If you purchased straight-run chicks (50-50 males and females) you may be able to distinguish the males from the females around 5 to 7 weeks of age. The combs and wattles of the males usually develop earlier and are usually (but not always) larger than in the females. Females are typically smaller in size than males. If you are still uncertain of their sex by appearance, you'll be sure who the males in the flock are when you hear them attempting to crow!

Things to do this week

- Your chicks are able to regulate their body temperature by this time and should not need a heat source any longer unless the outside temperatures are still very cold. Keep temperature at 65°F if this is the case.
- Prepare your chicken house or coop. Housing should provide approximately 3 square feet of space per mature bird (2-3 sq ft for roasters and 2.5-3.5 sq ft for layers depending upon size) and should contain sufficient feeders and waterers to accommodate your flock size so that all birds can eat and drink at the same time. Two to 3 inches of litter should be put down to minimize dampness and odor. A nest box for every 4 hens should be made available for laying pullets. Roosts are optional for laying pullets but not recommended for meat birds because of the potential for developing breast blisters.
- If possible, prepare an area outside the coop for your birds. Outside runs or fenced in areas will allow chickens to scratch and peck to their hearts desire, returning to the roost at dusk to sleep. The house needs to have a secure latch that is fastened each night if they are allowed outside during the day. An outside run attached to the coop with screening on the top and sides for protection will allow chickens unlimited access to the yard and save you time and worry.

Tips to Grow On

- Once you move your birds to their permanent residence, make sure they are protected from sneaky predators, especially at night. Raccoons have been known to figure out how to unlatch a "secure" door to gain access to the chicken coop!
- Your birds are still growing so keep feeding **Purina Mills Start & Grow® Sunfresh® Recipe** free-choice to help them reach their maximum potential. Chicks should remain on this feed until at least 18 weeks of age.
- Continue feeding **Purina Mills Flock Raiser Sunfresh® Recipe** to your mixed flocks of chicks, ducks, and geese. Turkey's can start on **Flock Raiser Sunresh® Recipe** at 8-10 weeks of age. Keep feeding this until market weight or laying age.
- In chicks purchased for meat production, the normal weight for processing is 3-4 pounds for broilers and 6-8 pounds for roasters.

Looking Ahead

- Laying pullets will need to receive a constant amount of light exposure once they reach 16 weeks of age to promote good egg production. For optimum egg production, a maximum of 17-18 hours of light (natural and/or artificial) per day is recommended.
- Gradually change your flock over to **Purina Mills Layena®Sunfresh® Recipe** at 18-20 weeks of age to support egg production.
- Pullets will usually begin laying between 18 and 22 weeks of age. Normal egg production is stimulated by increasing day length in the spring and egg production is naturally decreased in the fall when the days get shorter.
- Artificial light can be used in addition to natural daylight in the fall and winter months to maintain egg production all year long. If artificial light is not used, hens will stop laying when daylight hours decrease.
- After 10-14 months of egg production, hens will molt and stop laying eggs. During molting, old feathers are lost and replaced by new feathers. It usually lasts between 3-8 weeks and it gives the hen's reproductive system some much needed rest. Hens will return to production after about 8 weeks. Eggs laid in the next cycle are usually larger with improved shell quality but production typically drops about 10%.