

## **Preparing for your New Chicks**

Newly hatched chicks require a house that is warm and dry. A commercially made brooder (house specifically made for starting chicks) may be available from your Purina Mills Dealer. For a small number of chicks, a sturdy cardboard box equipped with infrared heat lamps for warmth will suffice as a temporary home. There are also many internet sites available which sell brooders of various sizes and designs to start small to large numbers of chicks.

Chicks need 0.8 – 1.0 square feet of floor space per chick during the first 6 weeks of age. Ducklings, goslings and turkey poults will require more space due to their larger size. The normal brooding period for chicks begins when they hatch until they reach about 6 weeks of age.

## **Brooder House Preparation**

- Brooders should be placed in an area that offers protection from the elements, is well ventilated (but free from drafts), and is safe from predators. This could be a garage, a basement, shed or some other safe place. You will want to check on your chicks often so keep this in mind when deciding where to keep them.
- Commercial brooders should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected several days prior to the arrival of your chicks to provide ample drying time.
- Three to 5 inches of dry pine shavings, straw or other absorbent litter (bedding) should be placed on the brooder floor. Paper towels can be used to cover the litter for the first several days to prevent chicks from mistaking the litter as food. Newspaper and flat cardboard can be slick and should not be used as it can cause leg problems (spraddle leg) in chicks.
- The heat source in the brooder or heat lamps should be adjusted to provide a 90°F temperature (at chick level) one day prior to arrival of the chicks. Turkeys require a higher brooder temperature of 100°F to start.
- A brooder guard ring (cardboard, plastic or wire barrier) should be placed around the brooding area for the first several days to keep the chicks close to the source of heat. If not used, the chicks may stray too far from the warmth and get chilled. The guard also prevents the chicks from crowding into corners and smothering. Provide enough space for chicks to move away from the heat if they get too warm. After a few days, the chicks will have learned where to find warmth and the guard can be removed.
- When using a cardboard box to start chicks, an infrared heat lamp placed about 20 inches above the surface of the litter will provide a good source of heat. It's a good idea to use two lamps in case one fails so that the chicks don't get chilled. Be very careful to position the lamp so it does not touch the box or any other object and create a fire hazard. The lamp height can be adjusted up or down to achieve the desired 90°F.
- Equip brooder with waterers and feeders. These are available in several different sizes and shapes to fit your particular needs.

## **Food for Thought:**

- **Purina Mills Start & Grow® Sunfresh® Recipe** should be fed free-choice until chicks reach laying age (18-20 weeks). This complete and balanced diet will provide everything that your chicks need to grow and develop into mature birds.
  - **Purina Mills Flock Raiser® Sunfresh® Recipe** should be fed free-choice to mixed flocks containing chicks, ducklings and goslings from hatch until laying age (18-20 weeks).
  - **Purina Mills Game Bird Chow® Startena®** should be fed free-choice to turkey poults from hatch until they are 8-10 weeks of age at which time they can be fed Flock Raiser® until laying age at 18-20 weeks. Game Bird Chow® Startena® contains greater protein content needed to start turkeys.
  - Water is critical for proper growth and development of chicks. Fresh, clean water needs to be available at all times.
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### **Your Chick's Homecoming Day**

After making all the necessary preparations, it's time to place your chicks in their new home!

- Gently lift each chick out of their Purina Chick carrier and place them one at a time under the warm brooder.
- Dip the beaks of a few chicks into the water. This helps them find it sooner and the others will quickly catch on by watching. When starting turkeys, be extra watchful as they are not as quick to pick up on the mechanics of eating and drinking!
- During the first few days, use shallow pans, egg flats or squares of paper as temporary feeders. Small piles of feed placed on them will allow the chicks to find the feed easier and start eating earlier. On the second day, regular feeders can be introduced. Keep feeders full the first week. Feeding area should be big enough to allow all chicks to eat at the same time.
- Occasionally check your chick for signs of "pasting up". Sometimes their droppings will stick to their rear ends and accumulate to where it blocks their vent and the poor chick can't relieve itself. If you find your chick's rear end is caked up, gently clean the vent area with a warm, soft cloth and warm water. This is usually not a problem after the first week.
- Provide chicks with 18 hours of light per day for the first week and at least 10 hours per day thereafter (natural light counts).
- Never let feed or feeders get wet! Wet feed is a breeding ground for disease and a recipe for disaster!
- Clean and refill waterers daily or more often if contaminated with feed or litter. Feeders should get a good cleaning weekly and more often if necessary.
- Remove wet or caked litter as necessary and replace with clean, dry litter.

### **Tips to Grow On**

- The first few days of a chick's life are critical. Supplying a little extra TLC in these important first days will go a long way in giving them the best possible chance for a healthy future.
- Prevent chicks from chilling or getting too hot! The best measure to determine if the temperature in the brooder is correct is how your chicks behave. If right on target, the chicks will be evenly dispersed. Chicks that huddle together under the heat source are cold. Overheated chicks will station themselves around the edges of the box or brooder guard, and may pant. The temperature should be increased or decreased accordingly by raising or lowering the lamps or adjusting the heat source.
- Keep it clean and dry! Disease can strike and spread rapidly between chicks if they consume contaminated feed or water. Make sure feed and water stays free of litter and droppings. Spilled water should be cleaned up to prevent wet litter. Dampness in the brooder house will cause chilling and can lead to disease.
- Remember, feed and fresh, clean water need to be available 24/7!

### **Looking Ahead**

- The best protection from disease in chicks is good management and proper sanitation of their environment. Extra effort in this area will go a long way in keeping your chicks healthy.
- Chicks should be vaccinated against poultry diseases common to the area you live in. Chicks are usually vaccinated against Marek's disease at one day of age, so they may have already received this protection at the hatchery. Check with your local veterinarian for vaccination recommendations.
- Be sure to feed your chicks a complete and balanced diet intended for young chicks like Purina Mills Sunfresh® Recipe Start & Grow®. What you feed today will determine how healthy and productive your birds are tomorrow!
- Don't worry if your chicks seem to be sleeping a lot. Like all baby animals, a majority of their time is spent sleeping and eating