

Raising Baby Chicks: how to begin, without burning down the barn!

So you brought home a box of fluffy baby chicks from the feed store... but now what? As a hen surrogate, your job is now to provide a few basic needs to your growing flock of egg layers: warmth, food, water and protection.

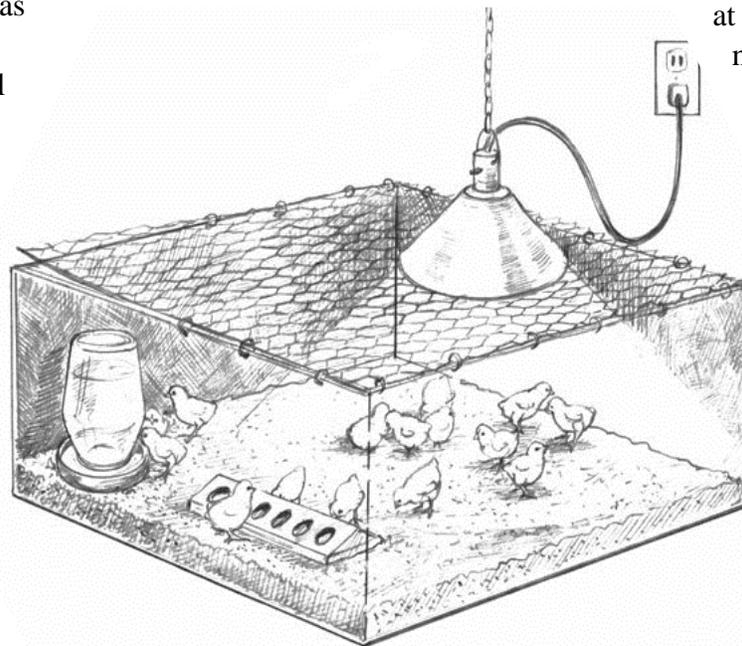
Chick housing can be as simple a setup as a box with absorbent material such as wood shavings or shredded straw that is kept warm and out of drafts. Don't use newspaper without a layer of shavings on top as they need traction to avoid getting "splayed" legs.

Young chicks are unable to regulate their own temperature and must have consistent warmth (95 degrees to start, lowered 5 degrees each week) which can be easily measured by their behavior: huddled chicks are too cold; chicks far from the heat source are too warm, those milling around freely in their space are just right!

This heat can be provided by a heat lamp (red light will cause less behavior issues than a white lamp: better rest periods and prevent pecking each other!) To avoid the risk of **FIRE**, it is advisable to place a metal screen over the box so that if a hanging lamp should fall, it will not ignite the bedding! Either way – plan to check your set-up often, and **DO** keep a fire extinguisher nearby.

Chicks don't need too big of a space to start out, and in fact can get "lost" if they have too much room, but they **WILL** outgrow their box in a surprisingly short time. You can add another box and connect them with a tunnel or a mouse hole cut out, giving them more room - and a kitchen and a living room area, so to speak.

Of course, you'll be **feeding and watering** these little cuties, and all of the chicks should fit around one (or more) feeding/watering stations



at one time - you may need to add more and fill them more often as they grow! For their first food, they need a balanced commercially available crumbled feed, fed freely. Don't give so many "treats" that they don't eat their crumbles as that could result in malnourishment.

Clean, room temperature water must be constantly available, and kept as far from the heat source as possible – they may refuse to drink hot water.

Chicks are pretty hardy if warmth, food, water and protection are well-provided, but the best defense against illness is to keep them draft-free and in **VERY** sanitary quarters. This may require placing them in a temporary holding area to clean out their box; or giving them a new box altogether. While you are [brooding and rearing your new baby chicks](#), be sure to read up on [backyard coop designs](#) if you haven't already decided how to house them when they outgrow your garage! To be continued...