

Why do I need a

How-to Guide?

Spring is a popular time to buy **baby chicks** and other baby birds—they're especially popular around Easter. They **require special care**, however, so it's important for you to understand how to keep them healthy when you get them home, or your new babies may get sick or even die.

BackyardChickens.com has created this checklist for you so you can be sure you have everything your family needs to keep your new pets healthy.



Care for all your babies

Backyard Chickens' Chick Care Check List

- Brooder box
- Heat lamp with reflector
- Light bulb, 100-watts or more
- Thermometer (optional)
- Waterer
- Feeder
- Chick starter
- Paper towels
- Pine shavings

Find advice, help and information on all aspects of chick and chicken care at

BackyardChickens.com

Backyard Chickens'

How-To Guide for Chick Care

Know how to care for your chick!



The Chick Care Check List & the information in this brochure is essential for your family to keep happy, healthy chicks.

What do I need?

There are **four main things** you will have to provide your new chick to keep it healthy:

Shelter

The chicks' first shelter is usually called a "brooder," and it must be draft-free. Your chicks should be kept indoors or in a heated brooder until they grow their adult feathers when they are from 5 to 8 weeks old.

Brooders can be very inexpensive, and you may even have something at home that will work. Some people like to use plastic storage tubs with a screen or with wire mesh over the top to prevent the chicks from jumping out, and to prevent any other household animals from getting in. Other people use an aquarium or even a cardboard box (for one-time use). Whatever you use, your chicks should have enough room to move around freely. A good rule of thumb is that chicks should have about half a square foot of space each. Adult chickens will need much more space, so keep in mind that you'll need to expand as your birds get older.

In the bottom of the brooder, use paper towels or something similar for the first day or two. Newspaper is too slippery for them and can cause leg problems. After the first couple days, you can switch to pine (not cedar) shavings, because by that time the chicks will have learned what is good to eat and what isn't, so they won't be eating their bedding.

Their bedding should be changed out every couple of days and should never be allowed to remain damp. Cleanliness is VERY important at this stage. Baby chicks are prone to a number of diseases, most of which can be avoided with proper sanitation.

Warmth

The temperature should be about degrees Fahrenheit for the first week or so and can be reduced by five degrees each week thereafter, until the chicks have their feathers. The brooder can be heated by



using a light bulb with a reflector. A 100-watt bulb is usually fine, though some people use a 250-watt heat lamp. A thermometer in the brooder is helpful, but you can tell if the temperature is right by how your chicks behave. If they are panting or huddling in corners farthest from the light, they are too hot. If they huddle together in a ball under the light, they are too cold. You will have to adjust the distance of the light or change the wattage of the bulb until your chicks feel comfortable moving from place to place in the brooder.

Water

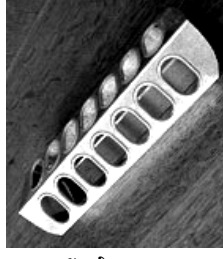
Clean, fresh water must ALWAYS be available to your chicks, and they'll drink a lot of water. In addition, you'll have to clean their waterer daily since they will get shavings and poop in it often. Don't use an open dish as you would for a kitten or puppy because the chicks will drown. If you must use an open dish, you can fill it with marbles so the chicks can't fall in, but so they can still drink from



the places between the marbles. Plastic chick waterers are easier to clean, inexpensive and harder for your babies to soil or tip over.

Food

Baby chicks will naturally scratch at their food, so a feeder that more or less keeps the food in one place is good. Chicks start out with food called "crumbles" or "chick starter." It is specially formulated for their dietary needs, and comes in medicated and unmedicated varieties. If you choose non-medicated feed, pay more attention to cleanliness. The chicks will eliminate anywhere, including into their food, so you must clean and refill your feeder often.



After the first week or two, you can give your chicks a worm, or even a bug or two from your garden to play with and eat. Greens are not recommended when your chick is less than two weeks old because they can cause diarrhea-like symptoms. When droppings are loose, a condition may develop called "pasting up" in which the droppings stick to the vent area and harden, preventing the chick from eliminating. Check your chicks for pasting often. If you notice a problem, clean off the vent area with a moist towel or even some mineral oil, but make sure the chicks don't get too chilled.

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