



Commonly asked questions

Introducing new birds to old

Which ever way to do this you are going to end up with pecking it is just in their nature – Its great if they can be introduced as a pair - I haven't always been able to do that, but if you can they form a little self help group and the two of them stick together. Late at night when your other hens are already in bed is the best time to pop the new ones in, however if that is not possible we suggest whatever time you introduce your new birds always put them straight into the coop, on their own, shutting them in and your exiting hens out for about 30 minutes to an hour, this way they get the smells of the coop over them and know where bed is and know where to escape if they have any pecking problems.

Should hens perch or sleep in the nesting box

We have found in previous experiences you may get more than one even three trying to sleep in the nesting box at once and then you run the risk of one of them being suffocated. Chickens perch naturally. This helps their claws and reduces the chance of getting any health issues.

Pecking

This can be down to boredom so if you can hang up green vegetation, I use the outside of a cauliflower or you can use cabbage/lettuce etc. Also old CD's are a good deterrent as they can see a reflection in it so hopefully peck that instead and it gives them something to do, especially if they are kept in runs and not free ranged. However in every group of chickens there is a pecking order and unfortunately someone has to be at the top and someone has to be at the bottom. This means that the "boss" will probably peck everyone else now and then especially the one at the bottom. Hopefully it will not be serious but you will soon know who the boss is, and who isn't. If you get a seriously pecked bird she will need to be kept separately until the wound has healed, if the wound is very nasty we suggest using Stockholm Tar (used on horses), really good stuff but messy so don't get it on any clothes. If you can smooth the tar over the affected area with the back of a spoon, that should sort out any problems and heal nicely.

Broody hens

This is when the hen insists on sitting on eggs rather than laying them. If left she will sit for 21 days. This can be stopped and discouraged by putting her in a slatted coop by herself, but within eyesight of other hens. The coolness of this coop, with the draft blowing up underneath her and together with a few days on her own hopefully will hopefully discourage her from being broody. She can then be put back with her flock and continue to lay eggs without any problems. If you don't have the facilities for a broody coop then, once everyone has laid and especially at night, you need to block off the nest boxes and keep her out and make her days as uncomfortable as possible, in a nice way. Hopefully she will soon get fed up of being moved about and stop the broodiness

Soft Eggs

When a hen lays a soft egg it is usually due to a drop in her calcium levels – so the best thing is to stop all fresh food and make sure she has plenty of mixed grit, hopefully within a day or 2 things should be back to normal.

Egg Eating

To prevent your hens from eating their own eggs in the first place. I think it can usually begin as an accident – An egg gets broken in the nest box for one reason or another, hens are naturally inquisitive and bustle around the egg to taste it, which they usually find attractive. They then start to break their own laid eggs. This can also happen when a hen lays a soft shelled egg. It can be down to boredom again – so make sure you have plenty of food and hanging vegetation to keep them occupied. Alternative you can fill an old egg shell with a very strong mustard and place it in the nest box, once they break that and get the taste of the mustard, they don't go back for more. Or you can use a dummy egg which is available at most pet stores. In the old days they used crushed shells instead of grit. They would put them in the oven and cook them at a high temperature for about 10 minutes however you have to get rid of any egg residue otherwise it can lead to them liking the taste of their own eggs.

Egg Bound

Signs that you may have a chicken that is egg bound could be repeated visits to the nest and/or trying to lay an egg for hours and becoming distressed. Later on she may become lethargic and 'droopy'. We suggest

that you carefully sit the hen in a bath of warm water and hopefully it softens the pelvic bones and allows her to lay the egg. Keep her separate for a while in a quiet box of her own with fresh water with a few drops of olive oil until she has laid.

Prolapse

This is when part of the hens egg laying organs are protruding out of her vent, sometimes a result of laying a rather larger than normal egg. It does need treating pretty fast otherwise it can lead to cannibalism from the rest of the flock. If you can hold the hen back to front and with her hen downwards, and gently use warm water to clean the area. Then apply some olive oil and carefully push the organ back inside. Then place her in a warm area for a few days until it has settled down. You may need to repeat the treatment a few times. Make sure she gets plenty of water and a little food.

Sour Crop

A hen's crop will become blocked by something she has eaten. The blockages could be the result of her eating long grass, straw or a piece of string which has got lodged in the crop.

The hen will show a large bulge in the crop area, they may also jerk their neck around trying to dislodge the blockage. Additionally, the stuck items in the crop may begin to rot, resulting in a sour smell coming from the chicken's beak (hence the name).

If this is the case then you need to gently pick up the chicken and see if the crop feels very squishy and there is a foul smell coming from the chicken's beak, the chicken can be helped to remove the sour liquid. The way we do it is to make the chicken sick, gently tilt the bird forwards so that her body is vertical to the floor and the head is close to the ground while massaging the crop contents gently toward her mouth. The chicken should remain upside down for 15 to 20 seconds maximum. Repeat 2/3 times a day and make sure you allow the chicken time to rest. When you think the hen has emptied her crop (partially or fully), be sure to keep the hen separate from the rest of your flock and give her time to rest. No food for 24 hours just plenty of fresh water. If the crop looks better the following day you can start to introduce household natural yogurt and then slowly introduce layers mash after that.

Blocked/Impacted Crop

A blocked/impacted crop will generally feel much harder than a sour crop and if tried the hen will not be sick. We suggest oil mixed with water or neat apple cider vinegar may be used to help move the blockage. A small squirt a little at a time down the birds' throat allowing it to swallow may be used to help loosen the crop contents.

The crop can then be gently massaged in a downward motion to help further lubricate the crop and move the blockage through the hen. This may take several applications over the course of two days.

Keep the hen separated from the flock so you can monitor if she is passing any blockage. Provide her with access to water and natural yogurt. If after a few days this has not cured the problem then it is a trip to the vets so that the crop can be opened surgically.

Moult

As far as chickens are concerned, from the age of about two, a moult is usually an annual happening. Moults are most common during autumn, and in my experience, it usually happens between October and November, just before it gets really cold. It can be quite frightening as one day they can seem fine and fully feathered and the next morning you are faced with a coop full of feathers. During the moult, egg laying will slow down, and stop for a few weeks. To help them reduce this time and get them laying quicker, you can add some poultry spice or tonic to their water.

Mites and lice

Red Mite is a blood-feeding parasite that lives in cracks and crevices in your chicken house, coming out at night to hop onto a bird for a feast. They are a very serious problem for chicken keepers and a large infestation can kill your birds by sucking their blood, making them anaemic. Mites look like moving specs of dirt, they are transparent to begin with but over the night they will feed from your bird and then turn red. We use a produce called [Diatom](#) which is very safe to use. If it is dusted around the coop floor, nesting area and rubbed under and into the perches it can drastically reduce red mite numbers. Diatom has microscopically sharp edges and it works by piercing the outer waxy coating of the mite which will basically dry up and die after a short while. **A dust bath** can really help the birds with mites and lice and is their natural way to getting rid of external parasites