

Care of Poultry

Matthew 23:37

I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.



With all baby poultry, there are four major factors involved to raise them successfully to maturity. Feed, water, heat, and light. If you follow the basic guidelines and apply common sense, you should have many rewards raising your birds!

Your local feed store will carry a variety of feeds for poultry, and can supply you with necessary medications, vitamins, books, water dispensers, feed trays, or other items to help you care for the growing and mature flock.

Baby Chicks, Guineas and Turkeys - brood 4 to 6 weeks

Feed- For the first eight weeks starter crumbles should be fed; feeding medicated starter only to baby chickens. To help the birds find the feed, sprinkle some on a white paper towel and place the chicks in front of it. They will soon peck at the small crumbs, and will quickly learn to feed out of feeder trays. After eight weeks, they can be maintained on grower pellets. For laying hens, layer rations (pellets) give the best results.

Water- Making sure as not to overheat the water, place the water dispenser furthest away from the heat source. We advise you to add vitamins to the drinking water as

well. Check with your feed store or poultry supply house for commercial vitamin packs.

Heat- Whether you use a commercial brooder or a homemade box brooder with a heat lamp, it is very important to maintain a steady temperature. For the first week, the temperature should be set at 90°. Reduce heat 5° each week until you reach 70°. At 4 weeks of age, 70° can be maintained in the brooder until the birds are cooped out. If you are brooding your birds in a homemade brooder, a red 250-watt bulb will give you best results. At all times, be sure the heat lamp is securely fastened above the brooder to avoid the risk of fire.

Light- This pertains to all baby poultry. Your birds will need at least 24 hrs of light for their first five to eight weeks. If you use a heat lamp to brood your birds, that will suffice for all the light they will need. If not heating with a heat lamp, you can use a 60-watt bulb to provide light.

Ducklings and Goslings - brood 4 to 6 weeks

Feed- It is very important not to feed waterfowl medicated starter crumbles. Medicated feeds are formulated for chicks only, which contains levels of medication that is toxic to waterfowl. There is no medicated feed on the market that has been developed for ducklings and goslings. Feed your birds a gamebird starter to the age of eight weeks, and from there on you can maintain them on gamebird grower pellets. Most commercial feeds for ducks and geese are labeled as gamebird starters or feed.

Water- Ducklings and goslings can really make a mess with their water. A very important rule is to prevent them from getting into the water. They lack natural oils which are provided from their mother's feathers to repel water. If allowed to bathe or have extended exposure to water, they will quickly become saturated, chilled, or drown. By nature, young waterfowl love to splash and dabble in the water. This habit can create much labor and heartache in rearing them, as it fouls the water, feed, and bedding within the brooder. Water dispenser access should only allow for their bills to enter. Be sure to keep the feed a distance from the water, to prevent either from fouling.

Heat/Light- Follow the same guide as with chicks. Monitor your birds, notice if they are huddled close together as if too cool, or spread apart while panting as if too hot. You may adjust the temperature accordingly to meet their comfort.

Brooder Environment - Maintenance

For all types of fowl, a draft free, warm, clean, and dry place with an endless supply of food and water is all they'll need to survive. In cold climates, it may be necessary to brood beyond five weeks. Be sure your brooding accommodations are large enough to comfortably house the growing birds.

Absorbent Bedding- Can be straw, wood shavings, or ground corn cob. Do not use cedar chips, sawdust, or treated wood chips.

Flooring- The surface under the bedding must not be smooth. A slick floor in the brooder will cause the bedding to separate, exposing the surface which can cause a young bird's feet to slip unnaturally sideways. This is known as spraddled legs, a condition that can seriously affect the quality of a bird's life, if not treated. We recommend using a fine wire mesh placed under the bedding for better traction.

Lighting- For the first five weeks, continuous light should be available so the growing birds can eat and drink at will. Have spare bulbs handy.

Grit- Place a small container of grit or clean sand in the brooder. It is necessary for your birds to ingest some grit to naturally aid in breaking down their feed for digestion.

Water- Food particles, bedding, and feces will frequently enter the water and quickly foul it. Be aware of the water quality, and make sure to change it as needed.

Addressing Aggressive Ganders

The problem with some hand raised geese is they become too imprinted to their "human flock". When imprinted to humans, the human is viewed as the parent for the first 2-3 months; for which then the young geese see their human caregivers as flock members. By 5 months old, both goose and gander are at full height. At this point; young ganders view other geese or you, their human, either as a potential mate or a rival. Prior to this, just at 3 months old, ganders begin to try their dominance on each other and you, by gestures with head down, bill pointed up, or wings spread out.

Should you find that **you** are subject to such gestures, it is best to counter these threats as soon as they start. Step toward the bird; if he doesn't back off, grab a wing

with a loose grip; as he tries to flee, release him. Repeat this as needed, he will try you several times until he gets the message. Be consistent.

Naturally to us this aggression is intimidating, and we pull or back away from those first nips. Doing that only secures the young gander's confidence in his new found dominance.

If you become the new owner of grown geese raised elsewhere; you may find a tyrant in the flock. Aggressive ganders have a guarded personal space they require, either for themselves, or with a mate and/or brood. You will be punished if you ignore this space. This space can vary from just a few feet, to yards. If he demands a large distance, it may be necessary to relocate him, as it can grow to be intolerable to have him around; especially if there are small children.

It may not be too late to show this gander who is boss. When he advances toward you, be brave, (he can't kill you). Allow him to come at you, then grab him and pin him down. He'll flap, holler, and try to bite, but keep him down until he rests; then let him go. This may need to be repeated a few times before the behavior improves.

If your gander later becomes reformed or just a lawn ornament, either way, be sure that he is not harassed with chasing or teasing as this is a recipe for a nasty gander.

And while we're on the subject of *recipe*, I vote a rogue gander is a roasted gander.