

What to Expect

When You're Expecting Chicks

New to chicks? Here are a few tips and resources from the Biocultural Conservation Farm to help get you started.

DOING HOMEWORK

- 🐣 Decide what chicken breeds are best suited to your needs, space, and location. The BCCF recommends [The Small Scale Poultry Flock](#) by Virginian Harvey Ussery as a great beginner's guide to chicken-keeping.
- 🐣 Talk to local farmers and other chicken keepers: if you're in the Fauquier area, Tangly Woods Farm in Keelzatown, VA is a great local breeder focusing on breeds suited to the Shenandoah Valley (www.tanglywoods.com.) The Facebook group [Pastured Poultry](#) is also very helpful for connecting with other chicken enthusiasts!

GETTING READY

- 🐣 Check with your zoning board to make sure that you can legally have chickens where you live. Grown chickens will need at least 2-3 square feet each in the coop and 8-10 square feet each outside to forage in order to be healthy and happy.
- 🐣 Prepare for predators: consider getting a guardian dog, setting up overhead bird netting and using material like canvas cloth in place of chicken wire to keep your chickens safe.
- 🐣 The [Virginia Cooperative Extension](#) has a great guide to coop building: bit.ly/vachickencoops.

BROODING CHICKS

- 🐣 Set up your brooding operation in an enclosed area with good air flow (such as a garage or shed with a fan.) You will need:
 - Brooding tanks: Cardboard (just be careful to keep it dry,) plastic, and aluminum containers are common choices.
 - Shavings: line your brooder with a layer of pine shavings or similar material to keep chicks from slipping and to absorb spilled water. Replace it when it becomes too soiled or wet.
 - A heat lamp, preferably red
 - A thermometer to monitor temperature
 - Food and water dispensers designed for chicks
 - A breathable cover to keep predators away (a sheet of canvas cloth, weighted down, will do the trick)

BRINGING HOME BABIES

- 🐣 If you order chicks through the mail, be sure to meet them at the post office as soon as they arrive! Shipping is stressful for fragile chicks, and you'll want to get them home and into their brooder ASAP.
- 🐣 When you first get your chicks home, put them in the brooder with only water and no food. Encourage each chick to drink to prevent dehydration; make sure the water isn't too hot or too cold.
- 🐣 The temperature in your brooder should be set at about 95° for 1-2 week old chicks. Then, you can drop it down 5° every week until it matches the temperature outside, and your chicks are ready to leave the brooder (at about 1 month.) There is a helpful temperature chart in [The Small Scale Poultry Flock](#).

FEEDING CHICKS

- 🐣 Feed chicks a quality organic chick crumble (the BCCF uses Nature's Best brand.) You should check young chicks' food and water around 3 times a day.
- 🐣 While you don't need to bleach their brooding tank, water and food containers (some fecal matter will help them build up immunity) make sure you replace food that has been soiled.
- 🐣 Supplement their diet with wild local greens like chickweed to help prepare them to forage in the great outdoors.
- 🐣 Once your chicks are grown and moved outside, Dawson Gap Naturals in Hillsboro, VA and New Country Organics in Waynesboro, VA are two great local places to get adult chicken feed and grit.

KEEPING AN EYE OUT

- 🐣 "Pasty butt" (the inability to defecate) is a common condition in newly hatched chicks, caused by stress. Various factors including food, temperature, noise, and light, could be at the root of it. New owners should reach out to experienced chicken-keep for advice if this happens. [The Chicken Health Handbook](#) by Gail Damerow is also a great source of information.
- 🐣 If your chicks are too huddled up, it could mean they are too cold, or that they are trying to keep away from a too-warm heat lamp. Dispersal is key!
- 🐣 Chicks are very sensitive, and if they get wet from spilled water they can go into shock. Check on them several times a day to make sure they are clean and dry.