

## Ten tips for baby chicks while they are in their brooder box!



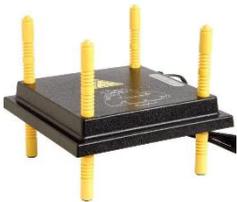
First of all, what is a Brooder Box you ask? A Brooder Box is a home for chickens of one day to about six weeks of age. Brooder Box space requirements change from ½ to 1 to 2 SQR feet per bird from one day to six weeks of age. There is no set guideline, it will depend on how fast they grow.

Brooder boxes allow you to be creative. You can use many different things from a watermelon box to a plastic tote to kiddie pools to homemade brooder boxes of so many different varieties. One thing to be sure of is that it is usually about two feet tall and I prefer three feet if possible. Make sure you secure the top before you think you need to. Chickens can fly well, especially when they are not watched. It can happen when you leave the room just for one second. Trust me, I know!

Quarantine chicks from bigger birds until they are approximately the same size or they will be picked on and possibly be hurt. Until they are old enough and big enough to stand up for themselves, they should be separated. They will eventually find their place in the pecking order, which in the very beginning is awfully close to or at the bottom! This pecking order is a serious business and is why it is recommended to introduce at least three chickens at a time, so they have peers that are at their level.

Where do you put the brooder box? Do you have a coop ready? If you do, perhaps you can put the brooder box inside of it. Chickens are exceptionally dusty, and it is not recommended to have chickens inside your house.

### INSIDE THE BROODER BOX



1. A Heat Source. Chick Heating Plate versus Heat Lamps. I admit I started with the heat lamp lights and made extra careful preparations to make sure that the wood chips would never touch the lamp as that can set on fire easily. There have been three barns that have burned down this winter in Massachusetts near us due to these heating lamps. If something gets on the heating bulbs, they can quickly start a fire! Please consider using mama heaters for chicks. Yes, they are a little more expensive up front but result in my experience and research in a more relaxed chick who also does better with the day-night cycle since that a lamp is not on all of the time.



2. Chick starter food-medicated vs. non-medicated. Coccidiosis is what medicated feed is trying to treat as a preventative by giving them amprolium which does not treat coccidiosis but helps babies fight off cocci oocysts while they develop their immunity. Coccidiosis is a parasitic disease of the intestinal tract caused by coccidian protozoa called the oocyst (like an egg) before the disease develops. Can last for several years and can be so many places. See reference pages for more info. Feed is a very personal decision. My choice is to keep the area clean and dry, but you will have to choose for yourself what feels right for you.



3. Clean Water. Make sure chicks do not drown! Baby chicks can drown in just a little bit of water. I suggest glass marbles in a shallow dish, like a yogurt container for first couple days. Switch to chicken nipples as fast as you can. The nipple waterers make your life oh so much easier in my experience. The very first thing to do for chicks is to dip their beaks into their clean water when introduced to the brooder box.



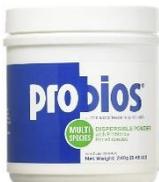
4. Bedding. Pine shavings are my preference, with some PDZ. I have tried sand that I very carefully sterilized in the oven. Yes, my partner thought I was crazy. Truthfully, it wound up getting wet too easily. I quickly switched back to pine shavings with PDZ. For the first couple of days, it is recommended to make sure they have a surface that they will not slip on as splay leg is a common injury for chicks. Paper towels on top of your bedding for the first couple of days can help with this. You will find you are cleaning the brooder box often!



5. Thermometer. Having one is critical for the first weeks of a chicks life. The temperature for baby chicks is 90 degrees for the first week and then reduced by five degrees until the chicks have their feathers at around six to eight weeks if it is about 70 degrees outside.



6. Check for pasty butt. Pasty butt merely is stuck feces but can be fatal if not corrected. Their poop gets stuck; one solution is to give them a small amount of cornstarch in their feed and use wet warm paper towels to loosen. I got attached to my two frizzles Poulu and Moulu because as I held them at a store, I also cleaned off the pasty butt they had (not here) and became very attached quickly. I also got pooped on. It makes for a great story.



7. Electrolytes. Having electrolytes ready is helpful for the first couple of weeks to give them a bit of a boost. You can make this in advance in a gallon container and refrigerate it. That way when you are doing late night chick duty it does not take so long to change the messy electrolyte water. Please make sure they also always have clean plain water to drink!



8. Perch. As they get older and more adventurous, a place to perch and climb is good for them. The perch does not have to be complicated. Remember they need a smaller and shorter perch to start. They grow fast and will need an upgrade as they grow. It can be a dowel or a branch from outside, check and make sure it has no mites or bugs on it.



9. Attention! Chicks need to be looked in on quite a bit the first few weeks to see how they are doing unless a real hen is mothering them. You are the one that responsible for showing them how to do certain things, like how to get water from the nipple waterer.



10. Treats. Hold off until two weeks old to give them treats. Good beginning treats are mealworms. They love them. Other tasty treats for them are grass, or green lettuce, or cucumbers. Be sure you know what is ok to feed chicks; I will be posting one online soon.



Bonus Tip! Ok, so I cheated and added one more! When you start introducing food other than their feed, they also need chick grit! Grit comes in a chick size and a chicken size--make sure you give them the small grit in the beginning as it helps them digest their food.

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