

I'm not a bot



Whether you want more chickens in your flock or you want to turn a profit by selling chicks, youll need to learn how to breed chickens. In general, most of the work is done by the rooster, but when it comes to the logistics of breeding chickens, there are certain things you can do to control the end product (chicks) and make sure the actual breeding process goes smoothly.Im assuming you already have your breeding flock chosen so thatwe wont go into genetics here. Instead, this article focuses on how to plan to breed your chickens successfully and safely:First a Special Note About The Birds and The BeesTo have a baby chick, you need a rooster and a hen. I know this is probably pretty obvious to most, but just in case you werent sure, an egg producedwithout a rooster matingwill not be fertilizedand will never produce a chick.1. Practice Selective BreedingWhen you chose your breeding stock, you probably had a plan in mind. It may have depended on whether you were breeding your two favorite birds or increasing or developing a certain breed further.It doesnt matter why you want to breed your chicken, but what does matter is the selections you choose to be your breeders. Birds should be healthy, meet your production goals, and hopefully have decent temperaments.If you are looking to promote a certain breed, choose specimens that represent the desirable characteristics of your chosen breed. See our chicken breeds guide here to make your breed selection.In general, dont breed birds with poor characteristics or health, and youll be golden.Flock With Columbian Wyandotte For Size Comparison2. Plan for SpringChickens can produce fertilized eggs year-round, but they tend to be more prolific during the springtime. This is especially true if you live in a cold climate. Chickens spend most of their energy keeping warm during the winter monthsand less time mating.3. Rooster to Hen RatioCommon knowledge will tell you that keeping more than one rooster in a flock is a big no-no. Usually, this is due to the competition more than one roo creates for hens.However, if youve raised your roosters together, they can probably coexist just fine as long as youve given them enough hens. Generally, each rooster should have access to 4-5 hens of their own.There is a benefit to having more than one rooster in a breeding flock, and thats a higher fertility rate.4. Keep Your Rooster With Your HensAs soon as youve decided which roosters you want to breed to your hens, make sure you remove all other roosters before adding your chosen roo. Leave your rooster with your hens indefinitely.He will dance for the ladies, win them over, and eventually mate with them without any extra effort from you.If your rooster is lazy, obese, or injured, he may not mount your hens. Keep watch and make sure he is doing his job. If hes not, something may be wrong.5. Wait TimeFor the next 2-3 weeks, your hens will continue to lay eggs fertilized by any previous roosters youve housed them with. Furthermore, if youve just introduced a rooster, dont expect fertile eggs for at least 2 weeks. Thats just how a hens reproductive cycle works.6. Monitor Your Roosters BehaviorSome roosters are more aggressive than others, and some are just overly eager to be the man of the coop. In other words, they may unintentionally harm your hens with their spurs and beaks.In reality, the breeding process is fairly aggressive in appearance. The rooster will jump on the hens back, hold her still by grabbing her comb or back of her head with his beak, and using his feet to stabilize himself.Dont worry, its normal. But, if your hens are getting bloodied up by your roosters, or if they are losing feathers or appear extremely stressed out, you may have an overeager rooster on your hands.Consider ceasing the breeding program and introducing a different rooster. Your hens physical and mental health is essential, so you need to keep her safe.7. Check Eggs for FertilizationAfter about two weeks, you will start to notice that your eggs will look a little different when youre preparing breakfast. Eggs that are fertilized will have a small white spotthe resembles a bulls-eye.Bullseyeyour eggs are fertile. If you wait for longer, you will begin to see red spot and veins. Check our guide on how to know your eggs are fertilized here.8. Store and Set EggsIts tempting to start putting every egg into the incubator immediately, but doing so only creates problems come hatch day.You see, eggs must be rotated, chicks must be removed from the incubator when dry, and opening the incubator when other eggs are in the hatching process may actually kill unhatched chicks. In other words, all eggs need to be at the same stage of development. The moment you start incubating them, they begin to progress.The solution is to store eggs for about a week and place them all in the incubator simultaneously. The eggs will all start developing at the same time. Storing eggs is like putting them in limbo for a short time.If you store your eggs at 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit for a week, pointy end down, you should still have a fairly decent hatch rate. Anything longer than that, the rate starts to drop.And there you have it! If you need more details, read our incubation guide!Breeding chickens is actually not very difficult because most roosters do the work eagerly and without issue. Ensuring the safety of your chickens from breeding to incubation is the most important aspect of breeding chickens.These simple tips will ensure your new breeding program runs smoothly with little to no errors or injuries!Share This Home / Backyard Chicken Learning Center / If youve read our Broody Hen Guide (and you really should!), youll know that hens have a natural state that makes them want to hatch the eggs theyre sitting on. In some cases, theyll even steal eggs from other birds when brooding.Of course, with no rooster in the flock, their broodiness will lead to nothing, but if you are utilizing a rooster to fertilize your hens eggs, then this is the guide for you!Well go through the reasons why people breed chickens, different methods for breeding, nutrition, chick care and more so buckle up! Quick Jump Chapter 1: Why People Breed ChickensPeople breed chickens for a variety of reasons, but the most common reasons are:Egg production and eatingShow them at a competition or a State FairFun!Benefits of Breeding ChickensIf youre breeding for one of the aforementioned reasons, it can be very rewarding for a backyard farmer! You can breed specifically for blue eggs to sell or eat or challenge yourself to breed a potential prize-winner, but many people breed chickens so they dont have to continuously replace their pullets every few years. It can be quite rewarding, of course, to watch a chick grow from an egg all the way through hatching and into a glorious lady, but some backyard farmers either dont have the equipment or the time to manage that.If you trust your hens to manage the process for you, by all means, do it! You dont necessarily have to use incubators and artificial breeding techniques. Your ladies are smart and can take care of it for you, but well get into that later! Chapter 2: Before you start to breed your chickens, youre going to need a plan of action.Whats the reason behind you breeding your chickens?Will you have enough time to artificially help them along the way?If not, are you confident that your hens can do it all for you?All these questions and more go into the breeding mix but as a rule of thumb, youre going to want to start the process with a goal in mind, the best birds available to you, and asheet for notes.You may ask why you need the best chickens available if youre just breeding for your backyard.Simply put, these birds are much less likely to produce chicks with diseases and defects, meaning youll have happy birds more often than not, and itll save you time, headaches and potentially some emotional experiences.Best available, admittedly, is quite a subjective term and can simply mean healthy and happy, so dont be too worried about making sure your flock is full of prize winners before you even get started.Chicken Breeding MethodsThe two most common methods to breed chickens are:Flock breedingPedigree breedingFlock BreedingThis is the most common as it gives your chickens the opportunity to breed at random with a chosen number of hens. Most backyard farms will have just one cock, so this makes things easier for you as a keeper.Pedigree BreedingThis emphasizes breeding your chicks to have individual traits. This is best done by individually mating a cock to a specific hen for the characteristics you desire.Youll need to take meticulous notes during this time if youre using more than one hen as chances are youre breeding less for fun and more for show with this method. These notes will give you all the info you need to know about which cock mated with which hen and which chick came from it.Breeding Chickens for FunThe likely reason most of you are interested in breeding your hens is for the fun of it! This breeding method requires a lot of work. You just need a cock and a hen. The good thing about breeding your chickens for fun is that you dont really need any of the equipment that comes with artificially taking care of the eggs. Well go into more detail about that later, but if you trust your hen to look after her chicks (and you definitely should) then thats really all you need!Your hen will take care of pretty much everything for you assuming her eggs are fertilized.If youve successfully bred chickens for whatever reason, please share photos with us on our Facebook page. We love to see them!Breeding Chickens for Egg ProductionSome of you may want to get into the commercial side of backyard farms such as selling the eggs that your chickens produce. Egg production slows down as your ladies age, so breeding for egg production might be the way to go to avoid having to purchase newpullets every three of four years.The best way to do this is through crossbreeding. Purebred birds are generally bred for show competitions and have had their egg-laying abilities stifled through the breeding process.If you have good layers in your flock, youll want to make sure theyre first in line for breeding. Its highly likely that a good layer will pass this trait onto their offspring. Again, taking notes as you breed will ensure youre successful so you can know which of your chickens are producing the best layers and the most eggs over time.Breeding Chickens for Show CompetitionsIts not often that a backyard farmer will be breeding their chickens for show but it definitely happens and can be a very fun and rewarding experience.This is really where the best available, analogy from earlier comes into play. Your cock and hen will want to resemble their breed as close as they possibly can before you breed them together.Of course, these chickens arent exactly available for a cut-rate price (\$5 up to \$25 and more per chick is not unheard of). If your plan is to breed for show, youre going to want to put a lot of time, effort and potentially money into it, and for some keepers, its just not worth it.There is a chance, however, that youll breed a bird so beautiful youll have no idea how you did it, whether youre breeding for show or not! Sometimes, luck is just in your favor, but your note-keeping skills will help you deduce why your chicken came out so perfect.Chapter 3: What to Feed Your Breeder ChickensYour breeders are a bit different compared to your broodies, but diet and nutrition will change regardless as you try to promote fertility in your cocks and hens.When youre hoping for a hens eggs to become fertilized, youll probably want to switch your breeders to a higher protein layer feed. We recommend the 18%Grower Feed found here (duh) as well as using some Oyster Shell to up their protein intake during this time.This is because higher protein means higher fertility and hatchability, and thats exactly what youre hoping for!What to Feed Your Broody HensIf youve been reading our blogs in chronological order (and you definitely should), youll know a little bit about what to feed a broody hen!During her broody period, she will not eat a whole lot, and you shouldnt be surprised if she doesnt even leave the nest for the first day or two.Once she does leave the nest, itll only be to eat, drink and poop, and then shell head back to her eggs. 20 minutes max! As for the food she should have available to her, we recommend you provide a high protein Starter Chicken Feed because of her infrequent trips to the feeder.When her chicks hatch, this will be the food you want to feed them too, so having it on hand isnt a bad idea anyway!If youre worried that your broody hen isnt eating and drinking, you can encourage her by gently lifting her off the nest and placing her close to the feeder.There is a chance however that shes been eating when youre not around, so dont worry too much if she still doesnt seem interested after youve tried this.SupplementsThe goal is never to go overboard on supplements for your chicks and their chicks, but you will need to supply them with the necessary nutrients they need because during breeding and brooding they wont have as much energy as they usually do.Vitamin A deficiency is all down to an improper diet for chickens. A clear sign of Vitamin A deficiency is stunted growth in your chicks. It can also manifest in different ways, such as dry eyes or a high susceptibility to infection, but stunted growth is the easiest to spot.The best way to avoid a Vitamin A deficiency is to add certain foods to their feed. Foods like broccoli and kale will do the trick!Vitamin D deficiency directly impacts egg production, so if youre breeding chickens youll want to keep on top of this. A deficiency can cause thin-shelled eggs because when a chick is growing, the calcium is pulled from the shell itself, and Vitamin D can provide the necessary calcium.Sunlight for 30+ minutes a day will do the trick, as will cod liver oil, but since this goes hand in hand with calcium deficiency, you can add Oyster Shell as a snack to your chickens diets.Share This Image On Your SitePlease include attribution to www.milefour.com with this graphic. When using an incubator, you should check carefully what the running temperature of the model is. Each incubator will vary slightly on temperature and humidity, especially since some models are forced-air incubators, and some are still-air incubators. A forced-air incubator should sit at around 99.5F while a still-air incubator should run at 102F. Never exceed temperatures of 103F for forced-air and 107F for still-air, as these are lethal temperatures for incubating eggs.As you get used to your incubator and hatch a few different times, youll start to notice which temperatures work best for you and can tweak as you go.While humidity control is not as important as temperature control, it should still be managed effectively. This is because theres a fine line between the perfect amount of moisture and the chicks either not being able to break out of the shell, or suffering from omphalitis. This is when the yolk sac cannot be absorbed, which leads to bacterial infections and death at hatching (and in some cases for up to 14 days afterward).Every incubator you own will have a humidity device that releases moisture at different levels. Some will have to be filled manually, while others will have a device connected to the incubator that releases the moisture into the air periodically. Regardless, youll want to always be on top of humidity control by adjusting the vents.Opening the vents decreases humidity by allowing air to escape while closing the vents has the opposite effect.60% humidity is the golden number for incubators. Each incubator is different, so following the instructions of your model closely will be your best bet, but if you want to be able to measure humidity exactly, youll need to purchase a hygrometer.Relatively inexpensive (\$30ish), these devices should keep your mind at ease when setting up your incubator to make sure your chicks hatch successfully. Just like temperature control, youll want to follow the manufacturer's recommendation for humidity, and make small adjustments for future hatches until youve found your sweet spot.Remember, not every egg is going to successfully hatch, so dont get too down on yourself or make any drastic changes to temperature and humidity the next time. Youve got this!Cleaning Your IncubatorEvery incubator should be cleaned after each hatch. If youre neglecting cleaning an incubator, youll see a sharp decline in the success of future hatches, and it will spread bacteria and disease to eggs and a fast rate.Incubators vary in the ease of cleaning, so youll want to spend time planning how exactly youll clean your specific incubator. Cleaning and disinfecting are the two things you must do to ensure your future hatches are successful.If youre planning on having eggs incubate while another set hatches, we recommend using two separate incubators. Some incubators come with several different sections so eggs can incubate while others hatch, but contamination, bacteria, and disease are big problems with these, so it would be best to have two or more incubators if this is your plan.Make sure not to use any chemical cleaners on any part of your incubator. The chemicals can be absorbed by the materials of your incubator and will have a negative effect on future hatchings.Warm water with a small amount of mild bleach is the best way to go for cleaning while you scrub with a brush.Once youve cleaned your incubator, make sure to dry it thoroughly before storing it (or using it again for a future hatching). If its a nice day, leave it out in the backyard to make sure it dries completely, and then store it in a cool, dry place like a storage room or kitchen cabinet if you have room.Chapter 5: Chick Hatching ProcessOnce youve done the hard work of candling your eggs, you should have a decent selection for hatching.Youll know when a chick is ready to hatch when the egg has a pip. The pip is the small hole a chick makes in the egg to indicate its showtime. That chick will generally hatch within 24 hours of the pip being made, but there are some exceptions dependant on egg size, temperature, and humidity.Unfortunately, during the process, youre going to run into some eggs that simply dont hatch. Its likely that youll find a chick or two that die after theyve hatched too. For any intact eggs you find two or three days after the first chick hatches, make sure to candle them again to see whats inside.What to do Once Chicks Have HatchedIf youve followed our Broody Hen Guide (and fingers crossed you did!) youll already be feeding your hen our Starter Feed. Youll want to continue with the Starter feeding plan for the first few weeks of the chicks' lives. Its highly unlikely that youll be able to separate the hen from her chicks and vice versa with natural hatching, so to make it easier for all involved, stick with the starter feed for now!Keep your once-broody hen separate from the rest of the flock along with her chicks for the first few weeks. Most free-range flocks get along just fine, but some chickens have been known to kill a very young chick just like they would any other small critter than gets up in their business.Once you think theyre old enough to be part of the gang, you can start to introduce them to the flock at night time. This is because everyone should be relaxed and more likely to welcome the newcomers as opposed to being rowdy and rambunctious.Use your discretion, however, and keep your eye on the flock for a little while to make sure everyone is getting along. If you notice any trouble, you can separate the chicks again until they grow a little more.When your chicks have hatched in an incubator, youll want to move them to a brooder once theyre dry and fluffy. Moving them while wet will severely lower their temperature and potentially cause premature death.A brooder can be made quite easily with an enclosure, a heat lamp and a food source for the chicks who should have at least a square foot of space each. Pine shavings can be used for bedding on the floor of the brooder, and youll also want to make sure they have fresh air.In the brooder, youll want to keep the temperature quite high at first. Between 93-95F will suit them for the first week, and you can start to lower the temperature by 3-5F per week after that for six weeks total. After this, they can survive on their own outside the brooder.Potential Chick Hatching IssuesMost issues surrounding hatching chicks have to do with improper temperature or humidity and can generally be prevented with proper planning and management during incubation.The two most common issues that arise in hatching chicks are:Crooked toesSplayed legsCrooked toes are directly impacted by the temperature of the incubator being too low, while splayed legs is the opposite. Splayed legs can also be caused by having too smooth of an incubation tray. When the chicks hatch, if they arent able to get a good enough grip on the tray, their legs can become splayed, so be sure to watch for that when shopping for an incubator.Keeping RecordsThe best way to ensure you can improve your hatching and incubation abilities is by keeping records of the chicks that hatch. This is because if youre planning on hatching chicks a few times a year or more, youll want to avoid the mistakes you may have made previously.The best way to do this is to use a wing band to keep track of whos who in the flock. Wing banding is relatively easy, but youll want to make sure the chicks are at least one day old and starting to toughen up a bit.The cool thing about wing banding is the band will grow as the chicken does, so assuming you keep it on, itll stay with the chicken for life.Below weve provided a video showing you how to apply a wing band on a newly hatched chick!Once your chicks have been banded, you should start to write down detailed information about themso you can improve your future hatches as you fine-tune temperature, humidity, cleaning techniques and more.Not only will you want to take notes about your chicks (color, gender etc.) youll also want to take notes about the hatch itself.When did it start?When did it conclude?How many chicks hatched?How many didnt?What was the average temperature and humidity?You get the idea.It may seem a little overwhelming right now to take so many notes, but youll thank yourself in the future when you can look back and see the progress youve made, especially if you use our handy graphic below!Share This Image On Your SitePlease include attribution to www.milefour.com with this graphic.

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