



POULTRY SOLUTIONS

What to Expect When Your Chicks Start Laying: A Guide to the First Eggs

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After weeks of anticipation—16 to 18, to be exact—your once-tiny chicks are finally on the brink of becoming egg-laying hens. It's an exciting time, and naturally, you have questions. When will they start laying? How can you support them? What's normal and what's not? Let's break it down.

Safety First (Always)

Before we dive into eggs, let's talk safety. Keep an eye on your birds. If your chickens start acting strange or "don't look right," don't ignore it—get help. Their behavior is often the first sign something might be wrong.

The Egg Countdown Begins

At around 16 to 20 weeks of age, pullets (young hens) typically start laying. But it's not just about hitting a number—several factors influence when they'll lay their first egg.

Key readiness signs include:

- Good body condition (muscle, bone, and lung development)
- Balanced nutrition and essential micronutrients (like biotin and B12)
- Consistent care and feeding routines

A hen's body won't begin egg production until it has the resources to do so properly. Once all systems are go, the egg-laying process can begin.

Weird Eggs? Totally Normal (At First)

When your hens start laying, you might notice some odd-looking eggs. Here are a few common sights and what they mean:

- **Shell-less Eggs:** These look like eggs but without a shell—just a membrane. Common in young hens as their bodies adjust. They're safe to eat if the membrane is intact.
- **Extra Calcium Bumps or Rough Shells:** Sometimes an egg stays too long in the shell gland and gets overloaded with calcium. It might feel rough or look powdery—this is normal and safe.
- **Eggs with Bands or Odd Shapes:** These can happen when two eggs bump into each other in the oviduct. As long as they're intact, they're fine.

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- **Blood Spots:** Occasionally, a blood vessel breaks when the yolk is released. It's harmless—just stir it in and carry on.
- **Cloudy Whites:** CO₂ can cause this—it's also normal.
- **Colored Whites?** Toss it. If the albumen (egg white) has any color beyond cloudiness, do not eat it or feed it to pets.

When Egg Production Slows or Stops

If your hens suddenly stop laying, there could be a few reasons:

1. **Broodiness:** Hens might decide it's time to sit on eggs, even if they aren't fertilized. It's hormonal. To break broodiness, remove access to nesting areas and interrupt the behavior—like placing a bucket over her chosen spot.
2. **Molting:** Typically happens in the fall. The hen's body needs a break to grow new feathers and recharge. Molting can last 6 to 18 weeks.
3. **Age:** After around 60 weeks, egg production naturally slows. Some hens, like leghorns, still lay well, but others may slow significantly. Even older hens may surprise you with the occasional egg!
4. **Daylight & Weather Extremes:** Short days or temperature swings can disrupt egg-laying cycles.
5. **Health & Disease:** Unfortunately, poultry experts are becoming harder to find, but institutions like Iowa State and Auburn still support poultry research. If your birds seem off and you're stumped, reach out to those resources or give your local extension a call.

Pro Tip: [The Eggshell Problem Chart](#)

There's a fantastic [resource](#) from Alltech with photos and explanations of common eggshell issues, what causes them, and how to fix them. Definitely worth checking out if you're serious about managing your flock.

Feed Matters – A Lot

High-quality feed makes all the difference. Whether you're starting chicks or managing mature hens, proper nutrition ensures not just egg production, but healthy, happy birds.

Our feed lineup includes:

- [Homestead® Chick Starter/Grower](#) – Essential for building strong, healthy young birds
- [Homestead® Layer Pellets & Crumbles](#) – Perfect for hens actively laying
- [Homestead® All-Flock](#) – Great for mixed flocks, with extra niacin for waterfowl
- [Homestead® Turkey Starter](#) – Tailored for backyard turkeys
- [Homestead® Scratch Grains](#) – Designed to supplement mature laying hens with extra energy and enrichment

We've formulated these feeds with care—and we stand behind them.

Want to Learn More?

Our website is packed with helpful articles, feeding guides, and product details. Whether you're a first-time chicken owner or an experienced backyard farmer, there's something for everyone.

In Summary:

- Keep your chickens safe and well-fed.
- Be patient—egg-laying can look a little strange at first.
- Know what's normal, what's not, and how to help.
- Good nutrition is key to consistent, healthy eggs.
- Even quirky hens can be great layers with a little care and understanding.

Happy laying season!



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