



THE ULTIMATE CHICKEN FEED GUIDE



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Introduction

Welcome to The Ultimate Chicken Feed Guide. If you are new to chickens or looking to get back into the wonderful world of backyard chicken keeping, you've come to the right place.

This guide covers everything you need to know about feeding your chickens, including supplements, treats, storage, and more!



The Four Types of Chicken Feed

Whole Grains



Whole grain feed is composed of cracked grains and other unprocessed ingredients. You can see the ingredients in the feed as it is still in a natural state. The granola-like texture is fun for chickens to eat as it encourages a natural pecking instinct and the

pieces are large enough for the chickens to grab. The vitamins and minerals are bound to the feed with soybean oil or flax oil so they are getting a balanced meal.

Mash

Mash is an unprocessed form of feed composed of ground-up grains and other ingredients. Mash is most commonly fed to chicks since it is easier for them to consume. Since mash is so finely ground up, it easily goes to waste on the ground (chickens are messy eaters!). Many people like to ferment their mash to get a thicker texture that is easier to manage. We'll get to fermentation later on in this guide.



Pellets




Pellets are the most common form of chicken feed available. They are easy to manage, and the compact cylinders minimize waste. Pellets are processed by grinding up the ingredients and molding them into an oblong shape.

Crumbles

Crumbles are pellets that have been broken up. The texture isn't as fine as mash, so it is a little easier to manage. It is comparable to oats in that there are very small pieces that all look the same.



So what's the difference? Reference the chart below to decipher between the different feed types.

MASH	WHOLE GRAINS	CRUMBLES	PELLETS
			
Made from finely crushed grains into a powdery mix	Whole grains that have been cracked for ease of eating	Made from cracked or rolled pellets into a smaller size	Made from mash through heat and compression
Potting soil texture	Granola texture	Oatmeal texture	Pellet texture
Unprocessed	Unprocessed	Processed	Processed
Messy	Visible ingredients	Messy	Less waste
Hard to find	Better nutrient absorption	Easy to find	Best suited for mature birds to eat
Best suited for chicks to eat	Preservative-free	Has preservatives	Has preservatives
Complete meal	Complete meal	Complete meal	Complete meal

Next, we'll discuss the differences in chicken feed for each life stage.

CHAPTER 2:
What to Feed Chickens



Layers (Egg-Laying Birds)

Chickens of different ages need to be fed different food. While the ingredients are pretty much the same, the ratios for certain nutrients vary for each life stage.

Chicks (0-8 weeks)

From the day chicks hatch until they are eight weeks of age, they are fed starter feed, which is typically 20 - 24% protein. Baby chicks eat about 1 lb. of feed a week.





Growers (8-18/20 weeks)

Growers are like teenagers. They need to eat grower feed starting at eight weeks of age until they start laying eggs, which will be around 18 to 20 weeks of age. Grower feed is typically 17 - 18% protein and has higher fat and fiber content than starter

and layer feed to support their rapid growth. Growers eat about 1 1/2 lbs. of feed a week.

Layers (18/20+ weeks)

From the moment hens start laying eggs onward, they should be fed layer feed. Layer feed is 16% - 18% protein and contains more calcium than grower and starter feed to help produce strong eggshells. Laying hens eat about 1 1/2 lbs. to 1 3/4 lbs. of feed a week.



16% vs 18% Protein Chicken Feed

Since layer feed is available in 16% and 18% protein, how do you decide which one to get?

Normally, 16% protein is the perfect formulation for your flock, but some flock-keepers decide to get 18% during cold winters or if their hens are molting.

It's a personal decision, as your hens will be getting a complete, balanced meal either way.

How to Transition Feed

Whether you are switching feed brands or transitioning your girls from starter or grower, we recommend slowly transitioning your chickens so their bodies have time to adjust to the new feed.

The time it takes to transition can vary, but feel free to reference the chart below and make adjustments as you see fit.



Corn-Free and Soy-Free Chicken Feed

Corn and soy are very common ingredients in chicken feed.

Soybean meal is used for its high protein content and amino acids.

Many people choose to avoid soy and corn in chicken feed due to allergic reactions from eggs laid by chickens on corn and soy diets.

Also, some people choose to avoid soy due to its high levels of phytoestrogens, a plant compound known to disrupt hormone functions and other disruptive health effects.

Corn/soy-free chicken feeds contain field peas and other grains as the source of protein and carbs.

Field peas are a much more nutrient-dense protein source than soy and pose no potential side effects for those eating egg by-products.

This is why the demand for corn/soy-free chicken feed has been growing exponentially, as education on this topic continues to reach more chicken lovers.

Don't worry, Mile Four's corn/soy-meal free feed does contain amino acids, so your chickens aren't missing out on any key nutrients.












How to Feed a Mixed Flock

So now that you know what chickens eat at different points in their life, what happens if you throw in a few ducks to the mix? Or what happens if you get more chicks in addition to your laying girls? Things can get pretty corn-fusing when it comes to feeding time.

Use this chart below to determine what to feed a mixed flock.

How to Feed a Mixed Flock



	 CHICKS	 GROWERS	 LAYERS
 CHICKS	Starter feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21% protein 		
 GROWERS	Keep separate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starter feed for chicks • Grower feed for growers 	Grower feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18% protein 	
 LAYERS	Keep separate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starter feed for chicks • Layer feed for growers 	Grower feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide oyster shell for layers free choice 	Layer feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16% - 18% protein
 ROOSTERS	Keep separate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starter feed for chicks • Grower feed for roosters 	Grower feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roosters eat what the ladies are eating 	Layer feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roosters eat what the ladies are eating
 DUCKS	Starter feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep separate • Supplement niacin for ducks throughout life 	Grower feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed to ducks from 3-20 weeks of age 	Layer feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exception: if ducks are males, provide grower feed and supplement oyster shell for laying hens
 DUAL PURPOSE	Keep separate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starter feed for chicks • Layer feed for dual birds 	Grower feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplement oyster shell for dual birds free choice 	Layer feed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18% protein

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In addition to serving your feather squad healthy food (and plenty of water), there are a few super important supplements you should provide to your chickens.



Grit for Chickens

Chickens don't have teeth, so they need to have grit with their food to help them digest it.

Grit is crushed up stone that comes in different sizes for different ages of birds.

The grit is stored in the gizzard to help grind down food correctly. Without grit, the food doesn't get ground up, which prevents nutrients from being absorbed.

Even if your flock is free-range and finding grit in the yard, we recommend supplementing their feed with grit to avoid digestive issues that are common without grit.

Offer your chickens the appropriate sized grit free-choice in a separate container near their feed. Laying hens will instinctively take as much as they need.



Oyster Shells for Chickens

Laying hens need additional calcium to support egg production. Oyster shell is one of the best ways to provide calcium to hens.

All you have to do is put some in a separate dish near their food.

Growers and chicks do not need this extra calcium supplement. In fact, if they eat food with too much calcium in it, this could cause serious damage to their bodies.

If you have growers mixed in with your layers, don't worry. Growers instinctively know not to eat the calcium, just as layers instinctively know they need to eat the extra calcium.

So why exactly do layers need this extra calcium? The eggshells they lay are mainly composed of calcium. If they aren't getting enough calcium, the eggshells become soft and the hen's health is compromised.

There are some people who crush up used eggshells and give those to their chickens as a supplemental source of calcium. The issue with this method is that once they learn to eat their own eggshells, they might start pecking at their freshly laid eggs, which of course we don't want to happen.

Once your chickens start laying eggs, simply pour some oyster shell in a container for your ladies, and they will take as much as they need.



Additional Supplements for Chickens

While oyster shell and grit are high-priority supplements, there are many others available that help promote the health of your chickens.

Electrolytes can be especially beneficial for chickens during hot summers when dehydration can be a real problem.

Other supplements help promote healthy digestion, provide immune system support, and improve egg production and quality.

Here are a few good ones you can find on Amazon:

- WornBGone Chicken Nest Herbs by Pampered Chicken Mama
- Coop Kelp by Fresh Eggs Daily
- Brewer's Yeast with Garlic Powder by Fresh Eggs Daily
- Electrolyte and Vitamin Supplement by Sav-A-hick



Scratch

Scratch is a delicious treat for chickens, but it should not be confused with chicken feed (a complete meal).

Scratch is a great tool to use when trying to get your flock in the coop at night or if you just want to be a hero with your gals.

Don't go overboard with this stuff! Scratch should be given sparingly and make up no more than 10% of their total diet.



Summer Treats for Chickens

Speaking of treats... if you are looking for a good way to cool down your flock on a hot day, try making these frozen treats with your ice cube trays!

These summer treats are especially easy for those who have a garden handy for fresh ingredients. Be sure not to use any rotten or moldy foods, though.

Summer Treats for Chickens

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1. CHOOSE A VEGETABLE



Cucumber



Peas



Corn



Cabbage



Broccoli



Carrots



Kale



Pumpkin

2. CHOOSE A FRUIT



Blueberry



Strawberry



Watermelon



Pineapple



Apple



Banana



Pomegranite



Peach

3. CHOOSE AN HERB



Mint



Basil



Sage



Lemon balm



Lavender



Parsley



Chamomile



Thyme

4. PREP



Chop up ingredients



Divide into ice cube tray



Add water evenly



Freeze for 3 hours

5. SERVE



Pop out the cube treats into a container.



Serve to chickens right away on a hot day.

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Mealworms for Chickens

Mealworms are a high-protein treat for chickens that have many benefits:

- Help grow feathers back after molting
- Boost the immune system in chickens
- Rich with vitamins and minerals
- Supports healthy egg production

Here are just a few of many different results people have experienced with mealworms:


- Hens started laying larger eggs
- Hens lay more often in the winter when mealworms are given in place of bugs and insects
- Getting the chickens in the coop at night has been successful with the help of mealworms
- Chickens went through molting season with less struggle thanks to mealworms

Make sure to not overdo it with these delicious treats. Aim for no more than ten worms per chicken a day.

What Not to Feed Chickens

Since chickens will eat almost anything, it's important not to treat them like a garbage disposal. If you give your chickens leftovers or unused garden goodies, be careful not to feed them certain foods that can be toxic to them.

Reference the list below to make sure you are giving your flock safe foods.




CHICKEN TREATS DO'S & DON'TS

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DO'S		DON'TS	
Broccoli	Kale	Apple seeds	Moldy foods
Brussels sprouts	Oatmeal	Asparagus	Mushrooms
Cabbage	Peas	Avocado	Onion
Carrots	Pumpkin	Butter	Pickles
Cauliflower	Quinoa	Candy	Raw eggs
Cooked beans	Radishes	Chocolate	Rhubarb
Cooked chicken	Squash	Citrus fruits	Salty foods
Cooked eggs	Sweet potato	Dried and raw beans	Tomato leaves
Cooked rice	Tomato	Eggplant	Uncooked rice
Corn	Watermelon	Fried foods	White bread
Fish	Zucchini	Green potatoes	White potatoes

SPARINGLY

Bread	Fruit	Ham	Peanut butter
Dairy products	Garlic	Pasta	Spinach



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Now, let's move on to more healthy things to fill your chickens' bellies.



Benefits of Fermenting Chicken Feed

Fermenting chicken feed is a great way to boost the health of your flock in so many ways. Here are just a few of the benefits:

- Improve digestion
- Absorb more vitamins and minerals
- Strengthen immune system
- Buy less feed

Buy less feed? Yes, chickens will eat 1/4 to 1/3 less feed when they are eating fermented feed because they're getting more nutrients with less feed.

Fermenting feed also solves any issues with the more fine, powdery components of whole grain chicken feed that can be tricky to manage.

The resulting texture of fermented chicken feed is comparable to oatmeal. This new texture prevents feed spillage that you normally experience from whole grains.

It only takes three days to ferment the first batch of chicken feed, and you'll find the process to be fairly easy!

Below is a sample of what the fermentation process looks like from start to finish.



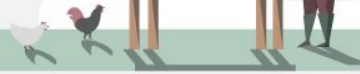
How to Ferment Chicken Feed

Now that you know the benefits of fermenting chicken feed, here's how to do it! We recommend starting with a smaller batch for your first time, then increasing the amount as you see fit. Just make sure to maintain a 1:2 ratio (one part feed, two parts water).

How to Ferment Chicken Feed



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WHAT YOU NEED



Glass jar (32oz)



Distilled water



Chicken feed



Cheese cloth & rubber band

STEP 1: ADD FEED

Fill glass jar with chicken feed 1/3 the way full



STEP 2: ADD WATER

Fill glass jar with water 2/3 the way full



STEP 3: MIX

Stir the mixture up



STEP 4: COVER

Cover jar with cheese cloth and rubber band



STEP 5: STIR

Stir mixture once a day



STEP 6: WAIT

Let mixture sit for three days



STEP 7: STRAIN

Strain feed from jar



STEP 8: SERVE

Serve fermented feed to chickens



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Here are a few other tips to keep in mind when fermenting chicken feed:

- If you use a plastic container, make sure it's BPA-free
- Do not seal the jar with a lid. Must be breathable
- It is normal for bubbles to appear on the surface
- Make sure there is always enough water during fermentation
- Stir up the fermented mixture prior to feeding
- Only serve the amount of feed chickens will eat at one time
- You can reuse the water and add more feed—it will ferment faster with leftover water

If you enjoy putting the time and effort into your chicken feed, the next section is for you! Keep reading to learn about homemade chicken feed.

CHAPTER 6: Homemade Chicken Feed



Why Homemade Chicken Feed?

Making your own chicken feed may seem like a good idea, but after many people try this, they find that it's cheaper and easier to buy chicken feed.

If you are looking to get 100% control over what your chickens eat, it's important that the right amount of each nutrient is in the mix. Use the chart below to make a complete layer feed.

Homemade Chicken Feed For Layers

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INGREDIENT	LBS.	RATION %
Cracked Corn	5 lbs.	30%
Wheat	5 lbs.	30%
Dried Field Peas	3.5 lbs.	20%
Oats	1.7 lbs.	10%
Fish Meal	1.5 lbs.	8%
Kelp Powder	0.34 lbs.	2%
Total	16.7 lbs.	Complete

Source: "DIY Poultry Feed", backyardpoultry.iamcountryside.com

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Next, let's talk about free-ranging your chickens. It's often a tough decision to make when raising your flock.



Allowing Chickens to Free-Range

Letting your chickens outside the run to roam freely around the yard allows them to get more exercise, gives them access to nutritious plants and bugs, and is of course super fun for the chickens.



Free-ranging your chickens sounds like a good idea, but unfortunately, it comes with a cost.

Take a look at the pros and cons to help you determine what's best for you, your flock, and your luscious yard.

Free-Ranging Chickens Pros & Cons

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PROS	CONS
More Vitamin A	Compromised Garden
More Vitamin E	Holes in Yard
More Omega-3s	Poop Everywhere
More Flavorful Eggs	Predators
Less Cholesterol	Damaged Grass
Less Saturated Fat	Neighbor Complaints

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It really boils down to healthier eggs and chickens vs. a nice looking property with living chickens. Try it out for a few days to see how it goes. If you can tolerate having a poopy yard/porch and luck out with no predator problems, then free-ranging is perfect for you!

To conclude this complete chicken feed guide, we will cover chicken feeders and how to properly store your feed.

CHAPTER 8: Feeders & Storage



Types of Feeders

Now that you understand everything about chicken feed, let's talk about what to put it in.

There are many different types of feeders ranging from simple plastic tube feeders all the way to fancy automatic feeders.

You'll want to make sure that the feeder you have minimizes the amount of feed waste. Chickens love to scoop feed onto the ground to eat. This is called "billing out". While it's entertaining for the chickens, it can be a pain to clean up and a bummer to see feed go to waste. Feeders that will minimize feed waste have a lip that is rolled or bent in.

A hanging feeder can also help prevent this behavior. Raising the feeder to the height of your chicken's back is recommended.

Make sure most or all of these qualities below are present in your feeder.



You can pay as much or as little as you'd like on a feeder. It's not necessarily a "get what you pay for" situation. Cheaper feeders work really well for some people but can be problematic for others. Fancy feeders make life a lot easier for some people but aren't worth the cost for others. It's really about finding what works best for you and your flock.

If you have a smaller flock, we recommend starting out with a plastic tube feeder and seeing how that goes. You might need to add another feeder to make sure at least one-third of your chickens can eat at the same time.

When deciding whether to keep your feeder in the coop or in the run, that is really up to you. Test it out for a few days to see how it goes, but make sure you bring it inside at night in order to avoid attracting predators.

Feed storage

A good feed storage container will have a snug lid to protect the feed from going stale and keep pests out.

A plastic or galvanized container works great for feed storage. Keep the container in a cool, dry place out of the sun.

If you use a galvanized container, keep your feed in the bag so it doesn't react with the metal.

Now that you are an expert in chicken feed, go forth and raise some awesome chickens!

Know of something we missed? Shoot us an email at milefour@milefour.com.

Sources:

["Soy and phytoestrogens: possible side effects"](#). Sergei V. Jargin