



THE ULTIMATE WINTER CHICKEN CARE GUIDE



Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Cold-Hardy Chicken Breeds.....	3
• Weather Adaptation	
• What makes Certain Breeds Cold-Hardy	
• Cold Weather Intolerant Breeds	
Chapter 2: Winterizing Your Chicken Coop.....	6
• Winter-Proofing Your Chicken Coop	
• Deep Litter Method	
• Winterizing Your Run	
Chapter 3: Chicken Coop Heaters.....	11
• Do You Need a Coop Heater?	
• Dangers of a Coop Heater	
Chapter 4: Chicken Frostbite.....	14
• Frostbite Prevention	
• Treating Frostbite	
Chapter 5: Feed and Water.....	17
• Feeding Chickens in the Winter	
• Heated Chicken Waterers	
Chapter 6: Routine Management.....	19
• Molting Chickens	
• Egg Laying in the Winter	
• Winter Boredom Busters	

Introduction

Chickens can acclimate to cold climates—they will make it through harsh temperatures as long as you set them up for success.

In this Ultimate Guide, we'll walk you through everything you need to know about winter chicken-keeping, so your flock stays happy and healthy in their coop.



Weather Adaptation

Chickens have layers and layers of feathers that trap heat, keeping their bodies warm. Most chickens are fully capable of withstanding the cold winters that we face year after year.

Most chickens? Why not all? Certain breeds of chickens have larger combs that are more susceptible to frostbite. Some breeds don't have very much feather insulation and are more equipped for warmer climates.

What Makes Certain Breeds Cold-Hardy

If you live in a region that experiences cold winters, you'll want to choose breeds that are cold-hardy. They have smaller combs, larger bodies, and have originated in colder climates.

COLD-HARDY Chicken Breeds

MILE FOUR



Ameraucana



Buckeye



Faverolle



Plymouth Rock



Ancona



Chantecler



Java



Rhode Island Red



Appenzeller



Cochin



Jersey Giant



Silkie



Australorp



Delaware



Marans



Sussex



Barnevelder



Dominique



New Hampshire



Welsummer



Brahma



Easter Egger



Orpington



Wyandotte

MILE FOUR

MileFour.com

Cold-Weather Intolerant Breeds

Lightly feathered breeds aren't able to maintain enough heat in their bodies to handle harsh winters. A few examples of these cold-weather intolerant breeds include:

- Frizzle
- Naked neck
- Leghorn
- Minorca
- Hamburg

Now that you know which breeds are right for your climate, let's talk about gearing up your coop for the cold in Chapter 2.

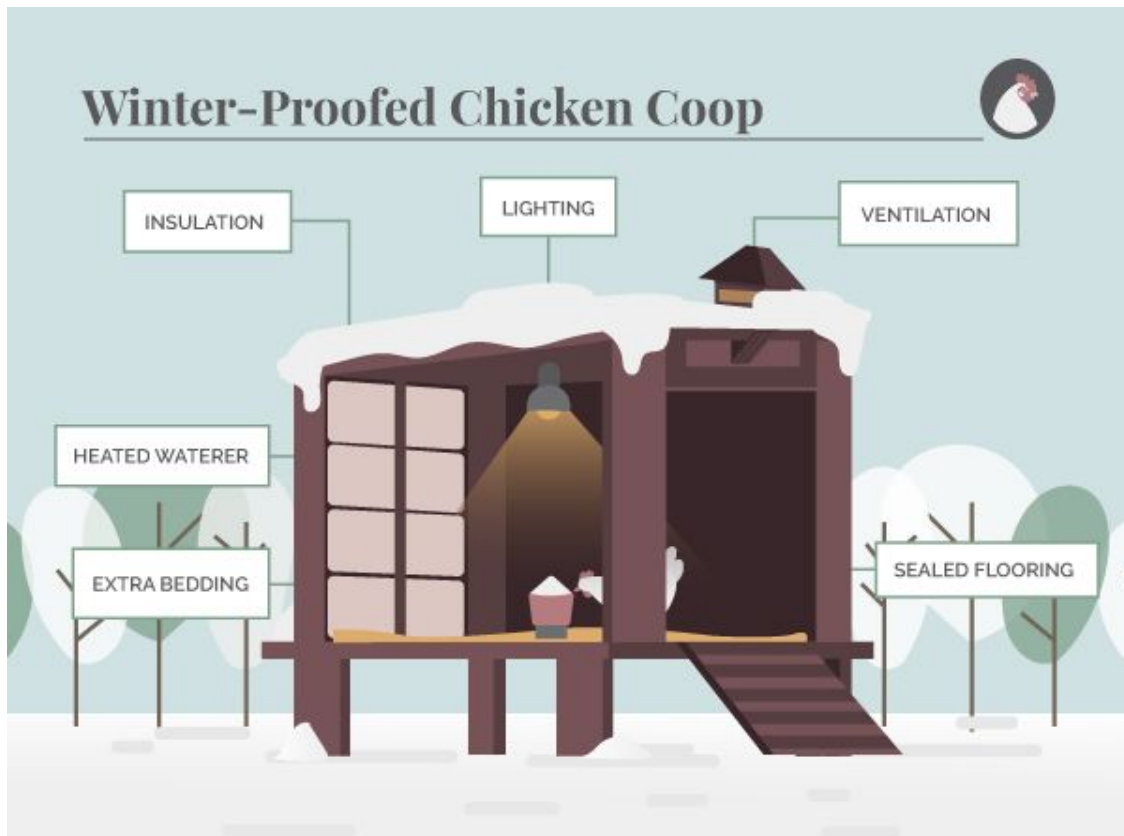


Winter-Proofing Your Chicken Coop

Before winter hits, it's best to take some time to examine the entire coop. Check for cracks, holes, and any damages that need to get fixed before the snow hits.

While it's crucial to make sure there are no drafts in the coop, you also need to have good ventilation, ideally coming from the roof of the coop. Ventilation prevents moisture accumulation, which is frostbite's close personal friend.

Below are the main components of a winter-proof chicken coop. We'll dive into each component throughout this guide.



Deep Litter Method

Adding extra bedding to the coop in the wintertime is a great way to help insulate the coop, but replacing bedding often is time-consuming and expensive.

The deep litter method is a solution to managing your coop bedding in the winter. All you have to do is put down about four inches of bedding and turn it over once or twice a week.

Over time, sanitizing microbes develop in the litter. This process decomposes the chicken poop and eventually turns into compost.

The key is to keep turning it over so it can dry out and deteriorate. Make sure there are no areas that are matted down.

Check out all these benefits of the deep litter method below!

Benefits of Deep Litter Method



Produces heat



Develops sanitizing properties



Easy to manage



Doesn't smell



Entertains chickens



Gives you compost

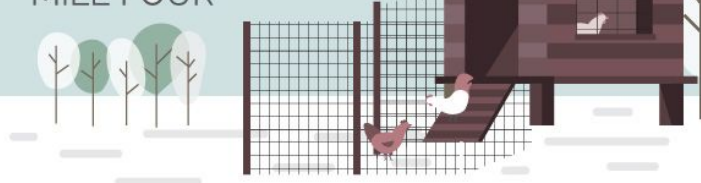
Clean the coop completely before you start this process. Begin the deep litter in the fall. If you're reading this in mid-December, it's too late. Carefully monitor the process and never put down diatomaceous earth in the coop when deep littering.






Winterizing Your Run

Chicken-keeping is all fun and games until your entire run is buried in three feet of snow. Don't let that be the end of playtime in the run! There are many things you can do to make the run accessible and enjoyable for your flock.

Winterized Chicken Run

MILE FOUR



MATERIAL	WHAT	WHY
 Plastic Tarp	Cover sides and/or top of run	Block harsh wind and snow
 Dog House	Provide mini outdoor shelter	Warm place for hens to chill
 Straw/Hay	Create walking path	Prevent frostbite on chicken feet
 Stumps/Logs	Add natural perches	Block wind and provide lounge area
 Shovel	Remove fresh snow	Prevent frostbite on chicken feet

MILE FOUR

MileFour.com

What about coop heaters you ask? We'll take a deep dive into that hot topic next.



Do You Need a Coop Heater?

Heated chicken coops are a hot topic, due to the risks they carry. Most backyard chickens are equipped to handle cold winters, and for that reason, most sources will tell you not to use a coop heater.

Despite the warnings, many people who live in areas where the temp drops below zero do use a coop heater. Some have had no issues with it, some have lost their coop and flock to an accident.

We recommend taking other steps to keep your chickens warm instead of using a coop heater.

Keeping Chickens Warm in the Winter

MILE FOUR



Eliminate Drafts

Fill cracks and crevices
in walls around the coop



Insulate and Reduce Moisture

Loosen litter regularly
with a rake or pitchfork



Add More Bedding

Put more bedding in the
nesting boxes for insulation



Create Warm Lounges

Install perches in the least
drafty part of the housing



Use Correctly Sized Perches

Use perches that are 2"x2" so birds can cover their toes with breast feathers at night



Build Internal Heat

Increase interest in eating by feeding often



Reduce Humidity

Remove damp patches of litter around doorways and waterers



Prevent Water Freezing

Use a heated chicken waterer to prevent water from freezing



MILE FOUR

MileFour.com

Dangers of a Coop Heater

Aside from a coop fire, another big concern about coop heaters are power outages. If the chickens are used to a heated coop and their heat supply is lost, causing a sudden drop in temperature, they may freeze and die.

If you do decide to use one, make sure it's set to make the coop only a little bit warmer than it is outside. Remember, extreme temperature changes are rough for chickens.

Now that you are aware of the risks of a coop heater, it's completely up to you to decide if you want one or not. Your flock, your decision!

In the next chapter, we'll talk more about frostbite prevention.



Frostbite Prevention

Frostbite is caused by excess moisture in the cold air, which freezes the fluid in the cells of a chicken's waddles, comb, or toes.

Everything we've talked about thus far is a good way to prevent your chickens from getting frostbite. For a refresher, the most important frostbite prevention measures are listed below.

- Reduce moisture by removing damp litter and improving ventilation
- Eliminate drafts by patching any cracks in the coop

Make sure you are keeping an eye out for signs of frostbite on combs, waddles, and feet of your flock. The photo below shows what frostbite looks like on a chicken's comb.



Treating Frostbite

If you notice one of your chickens has a pale looking comb or waddle and it's still frozen, gently apply a warm cloth for 10 minutes without rubbing it. Once it's thawed out, apply some Neosporin.

Keep that chicken separate from the others so she or he has time and space to heal.

Unfortunately, sometimes you might notice frostbite on one of your chickens after it's too late. In this case, the comb or waddles will have already been thawed and look swollen. You'll still want to gently apply Neosporin and isolate that bird from the others to prevent further damage.

Once the swelling reduces in a frostbitten area, it will eventually fall off and will not grow back.

We don't mean to scare you with this information, but as you can see it's important to take the necessary precautions that prevent frostbite in the first place.

Now we will switch gears to a less depressing subject—feed and water for chickens in the winter!

CHAPTER 5:
Feed and Water



Feeding Chickens in the Winter

During the winter, chickens use more energy to stay warm in the wintertime. They need to eat more carbs and protein so their bodies are working to create energy, which creates internal heat.

Increasing your chicken's protein level in their feed to 18% will help provide your chickens' with more energy to produce internal heat during cold winter.

Carbs are converted into energy faster than protein, which is why scratch is a popular morning or evening snack. Morning time for internal heat until birds are warmed by radiant heat from the sun and evening time to boost body heat while perching through the night.

If you feed your chickens scratch, make sure it (or other treats) do not make up more than 10% of their total diet.



Heated Chicken Waterers

Chickens need to have access to water all day, which can be tough to provide in the winter when temperatures drop below freezing. If your chicken's water is freezing, it's best to get a water heater of some sort in order to avoid water deprivation.

A heating pan or an immersion heater are two common types of water heaters. The other option is to just buy a waterer that plugs in to control the temperature of the water. Shop these items on Amazon below.

In the final chapter, we'll discuss a few routine management pointers for wintertime care.



Molting Chickens

Once a year, chickens lose and regrow their feathers. This process, called molting, typically begins at the end of summer or early fall and lasts 14 to 16 weeks.

Chicken's feathers are 85% protein, so when their bodies are in the process of growing new feathers, they need more protein to help them through it. This also explains why their laying rate slows down. Nutrients are being repurposed into producing new plumage instead of producing eggs.



You can help your hens through this process by switching their feed to 18% protein and giving them mealworms as supplemental protein. Mealworms are rich in amino acids, which are needed during the molt.

Keep reading to learn more about what to feed chickens in the winter.

Egg Laying in the Winter

As daylight decreases in the winter, chickens naturally lay fewer eggs or stop laying altogether. This period of time gives hens a break and a chance to recharge.

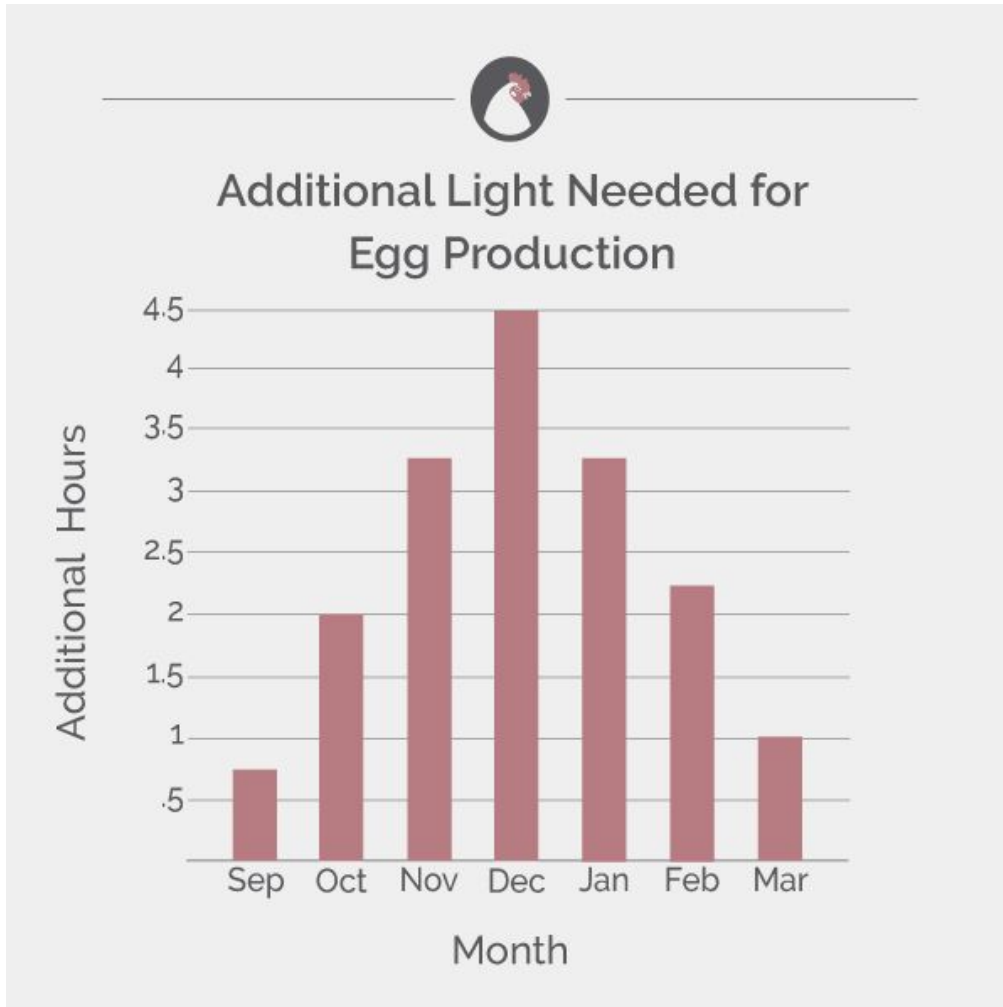
If your chickens are valued pets in your life, let nature take its course and make peace with no fresh eggs this winter. Your chickens will be less

stressed and more physically healthy when they can take a break from laying.

The reason hens are wired to stop laying eggs in the winter is because their offspring would not be able to survive in those weather conditions. The more you know!

If you are raising chickens for the sole purpose of eggs and want them to keep laying, you'll need to augment daylight. In most parts of the United States, total daylight hours start to go below 15 in September.

The chart below illustrates how many extra hours of light are needed each month to maintain 15 hours of light.



Your chickens will also need to eat more food than usual to help them stay warm and produce eggs during the winter.

Winter Boredom Busters

Chickens spend a lot more time in the coop during the winter to stay warm. As you can imagine, this gets pretty boring for them. To keep your chickens entertained and out of trouble, try some of these ideas below.

Winter Boredom Busters For Chickens

MILE FOUR



1

Toss bails of hay or straw in the coop for chickens to play with

2

Hang corn, cabbage, or other vegetable from twine in the coop

3

Add a few chicken swings to non-drafty areas of the coop

4

Put a mirror in the coops so your ladies can check themselves out

5

Add extra perches outside using branches or ladders

6

Throw scratch in their bedding so they can hunt for it

7

Add a dust bath inside the coop or run

MILE FOUR

MileFour.com

If you have kids, get them involved in creating these boredom busters. They'll love it! Again, make sure you aren't feeding them too many treats. Keep the goodies under 10% of your chicken's diet.

Now that you know how to take care of chickens in the winter, that cold white stuff shouldn't be so scary anymore.

If you have a good winter chicken-keeping trick to share, shoot us an email: milefour@milefour.com.