

WELCOME TO HATCHING CHICKS

We hope you enjoy this wonderful real-life experience. I have supplied you with the following information to help make this experience as successful as possible. Please take a few minutes to read through it or watch some of the videos on our YouTube channel.

THE INCUBATOR -

The incubator has been preset to the correct temperature. It should remain stable if it is not placed in direct sunlight, or not too close to a heater or air conditioner. The hen eggs I have supplied you with have 18 to 21 day old embryos in them. These eggs will hatch throughout the first week and should be all finished hatching by Thursday. It is quite common for one or two eggs not to hatch. If you have duck eggs they will need to be turned in the morning and afternoon up until the Friday of the first week and they are due to hatch early in the second week.

HUMIDITY

As the water in the container inside your incubator evaporates it keeps the incubator environment humid. This keeps the eggshells and membranes soft making it easier for the chicks to hatch. Avoid lifting the lid of the incubator as much as possible as this lets the humidity escape. However you will need to lift the lid to top up the water level in the container every few days with lukewarm water.

THE HATCH – The Exciting Part!

You will hear peeping noises coming from inside the eggs, up to 2 days before the hatch. Next you will notice small holes appearing in some of the eggs. This means the hatch is only a few hours away! The chick will peck then rest, peck then rest..... until finally the egg will break right open and the chick will slide out wet and exhausted.

After a few minutes, the chick will stand up and start exploring in a very shaky, wobbly fashion. The chicks do not need to eat or drink for 48 hours after hatching. So they can stay in the incubator overnight if they have hatched late in the afternoon. If the chicks hatched during the morning, there is no problem leaving them in the hatcher until the following morning. It is best to leave them in the incubator until they are dry and fluffy and have become stronger and more stable on their feet. So there is no need to rush.

Now it is important to remember that not all chicks will hatch - 100% hatch rates are very rare. Some chicks may make a hole and be too weak to go any further. Others may not even make a hole. If you have any chicks or ducklings that have been trying to hatch for 24 hours it is possible that they may get stuck inside the shell because the membrane dries out after being exposed to warm air for a long period. If the chick or duck seems healthy and strong you can help it hatch by bathing the dried out membrane with a tissue soaked in warm water or immersing the whole egg in a small bowl of warm water for a minute, taking care to keep the beak out of water. This will soften the membrane and you should be able to peel some of the shell off. If there is any signs of fresh blood at this stage then leave the chick for another 5 hours or overnight then check again. Once the chick is fully hatched and has been left to recover, if it still has dried membrane stuck to it, another soak in the warm water and a wipe with tissues should clean it up. Dry the chick with a tissue and put it back in incubator as quickly as possible. You may also have weak or deformed chicks hatching. These chicks can be placed in the brooder box with the others. If the stronger chicks start to pick on the weaker one or trample over it, you can place the weak one in its own container inside the brooder box. Remember they do not need to eat or drink for 48hrs after hatching, however if the chick still needs to be isolated after this period you can use an upside-down bottle lid blu tacked to the bottom for water and sprinkle food directly on the bottom. Death, illness and deformity are all a part of life and young children are curious and keen to discuss these topics. If you have any sick chicks you are concerned about there is more information on this website under chicken health. Please ring me for any further information.

THE BROODER BOX

The perspex brooder box will need to be warmed with the lamp 20 mins before placing the chicks inside. Chicks need to be in a warm environment. The best way to judge if the temperature of the box is too hot or too cold is to look at what the chicks are doing. If they are too cold they will be huddled under the light. You can place a blanket over the box and just have the front showing. It is a good idea to have a blanket over the box at night during the cooler months as the temperatures drop dramatically inside the building when the heating goes off. If they are too hot they will tend to stay behind the light to get away from the heat. You can adjust this temperature by opening the lid or have it propped open slightly or in very hot weather turn the light off during the heat of the day.

Towards the end of the 2nd week the chicks will start to jump and stretch their wings so do not leave the lid all the way open or you may lose a few! Make sure **not** to place the box anywhere that it may become exposed to strong, direct sunlight as the inside of the box will overheat rapidly.

The chicks will not make much mess during their 1st week of life and the box probably won't need cleaning out until the Monday of the 2nd week, then maybe each day or so after that. If you run out of food, the chicks can be fed on crushed weet-bix or 1 minute oats. If you run out of clean litter, you can just have a newspaper on the bottom of the box. During the second week you could try giving the chicks some worms. This usually causes great excitement for the chicks, and it is very entertaining to watch.

HANDLING THE CHICKS

During the 2nd week, the children can handle the chicks. This activity must be supervised at all times. Some children tend to squeeze them too hard or drop them, so it's a good idea to handle them when sitting in a circle – after an explanation & demonstration on handling them has been given. In the warmer weather, children can sit outside on the grass in a circle and watch

the chicks pecking & scratching in the middle. If the chicks get too cold, they will chirp loudly to let you know it is time to put them back in the box.

During the second week if it is too cold to take the chicks outside the chicks can be taken from the box and placed in a larger home- made enclosure for a half hour or so. Children love to see how the chicks behave in a different environment. I have seen the children at one centre build an elaborate enclosure out of wooden blocks complete with slides and tunnels and a maze for the chicks to 'play' in.

Spot the CHICKS at the Farm



Ducklings tend to wriggle and squirm a lot more than chicks and so I don't recommend that young children handle them, however you can set up a tub of lukewarm water and the children can watch them go for a swim for no longer than a few minutes. Keep the water level lower than the sides of the container so they can't jump out. Dry off with a cloth before placing back in the brooder box.

It is good hygiene to wash hands immediately after handling chicks. **Also, young children should be instructed not to put their fingers in their mouths until they have washed their hands.**

CLEAN UP

PLEASE DO NOT WIPE THE INCUBATOR OR THE BROODER BOX WITH ANY ABRASIVE CLOTH OR CLEANING LIQUID

We wash all equipment after it has been used so please do not worry too much about cleaning equipment. Do not wash or wipe the incubator lid. When all parts are dry, reassemble in the same way they were when in operation, and store back in the large plastic box that it was delivered in. Any unsold chickens are transported back to the farm in the brooder box.

SAYING GOODBYE and PICK-UP DAY

By the end of the 2 weeks, the children will have become quite attached to these cute little chicks and ducklings. On the 2nd Friday we will be back to collect equipment and any unsold chicks. Your pick up time will be sent to you via SMS and you will be able to track the driver on approach. Please ensure that the children get their last opportunity to handle chicks and say goodbye before we come. Some families or staff may wish to purchase them - if they do please refer them to our website for details. They should be made aware that in a few more weeks they won't be so cute. They will also be noisier & smellier. There is a 50% chance, they will grow up to be roosters (crowing at the crack of dawn instead of laying eggs) or Drakes.

Any hatchlings that are not purchased by the staff are sold to a family hatchery on the Central Coast. The chicks are mixed egg laying breeds and the ducklings are Pekins.