



Reading Time: 8 minutes

I couldn't think of a better New Year's resolution than starting your own [backyard chicken](#) flock. This next year is going to bring you mixed feelings of eagerness and anxiety with hopefully the culmination of happiness and joy. [Raising chickens for eggs](#), meat or as pets is a fantastic hobby. Mark your calendars as you are going to have one busy year ahead of you. This year-round chicken care calendar should help you know what to expect.

## January

The icy cold of the winter is the best time to research laws and regulations regarding chicken care. Seeking out local feed stores, poultry associations and fellow chicken keepers will help you narrow in on what your exact goals

are for keeping chickens. Social media, like Facebook and Yahoo Groups, also have a slew of online chicken associations and clubs that will help you decide what birds are best for your backyard.

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Kaydee Geerlings of Perez of Town-line Poultry Farm, Inc. helps customers and vendors understand chicken care. Townline Poultry Farm, Inc. is a four-generation family-run business, and her job spans from accounts payable and purchaser to scrubbing the bathroom and [cleaning coops](#). Geerlings-Perez's job can be summed up in two words — farmer's daughter.

She adds that one of the first things a new chicken caregiver needs to ask themselves is, "What am I hoping to gain out of my chicken flock?" With an abundance of choices regarding [chicken breeds](#) and purposes, questions potential poultry keepers should consider include:

- Are you solely looking for eggs, quick growers for meat or a little of both (dual-purpose)?
- Are you wanting variety within your flock (feather color, uniqueness) or solely focused on egg production?
- Do you want brown, white or colored eggs?
- If you are looking for meat birds, what type would you like? Are you interested in [free-range chickens](#)?

By answering these questions, you can determine what breeds will suit your needs the best. This will then allow you to finish the rest of the necessary research including coop space, feed requirements and possible equipment.

Most chick suppliers can also provide a step-by-step guideline for space and temperature recommendations for brooding chicks.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “Those considering a poultry purchase in the spring should definitely take the time to research in January,” Geerlings-Perez says.

## February

By February, most hatcheries will have incubators full of fertile eggs and are gearing up for full production.

“This would be a good time to make sure you either have all of the necessary equipment and coops on hand or get them on order. If you have breeds selected, shop hatcheries and suppliers that advertise for those particular breeds and compare pricing/availability. Purchasing from an [NPIP certified chicken hatchery](#) is recommended. When purchasing from a feed store or any type of ‘middle-man,’ make sure the validity, quality and certification of originating breeder or hatchery is verified. To prepare yourself for contacting a supplier, sound like a poultry pro by familiarizing yourself on chicken lingo. Reading past issues of Backyard Poultry magazine and finding out what pullets, straight run, cockerels, broilers, hybrid, heritage, temperament and hardiness mean will avoid miscommunications with the supplier. You can place your order as early as the end of February to ensure booking for a ship date you prefer.” Geerlings-Perez says.

Do not forget to calculate for predators, disease or rearing problems. If you want a certain number, order a few more as an insurance policy.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* Edward Gates, manager at the Randall Burkey Co., Inc., says February is for preparation. “Make sure you have a big enough coop and run for the number of chickens you plan on getting as well as a safe place to bring your chicks home.”

“This is a great time to get your order in from your favorite hatchery or chick retailer!” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

## **March**

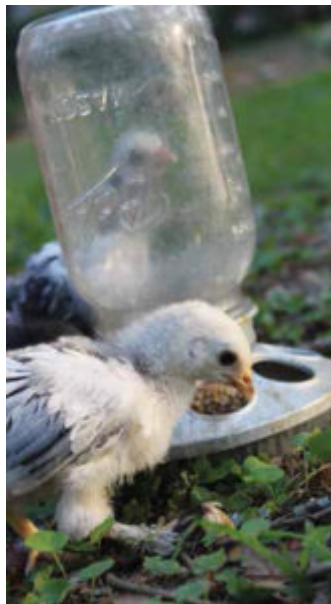
As spring unthaws in your backyard, March for most of the country is a suitable time to make sure your coop space is set up properly and provides all necessary supplies such as feed and water bowls and troughs, heat lamps and bedding.

Predator-proof fencing and coops are a must for proper chicken care. This can also be a great time to contact the hatchery/supplier of your choice to schedule your shipment of chicks.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “Many suppliers are sold out for weeks ahead of time. I would advise placing your order around two to four weeks in advance from when you would like to receive them,” Geerlings-Perez warns.

“This is where it truly gets exciting! Pick up or bring home your chicks, making sure that your brooder is set up well ahead of time,” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

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## April

Happy, healthy, active, eating, peeping chicks will be arriving at your home any day!

“One or two days prior to the expected arrival day, ensure your brooder is completely set up and up to temperature,” Geer-lings-Perez says. “Once you have picked your shipment of chicks up and brought them home, carefully place them in the brooder near the food and heat.”

Growing up I would carefully grab their delicate but durable bodies out of the box and gently dip their beaks into a sugary water to give them a kick-start. Geerlings-Perez says that this can help teach and encourage them to begin drinking and eating quickly.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “This is where it truly gets exciting! Pick up or bring home your chicks, making sure that your brooder is set up well ahead of time,” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

“Most feed stores and hatcheries offer a packet of vitamins and electrolytes that can be added to the water — very beneficial for the first delicate weeks of raising chicks,” said Kaydee Geerlings-Perez, Townline Poultry Farm, Inc.

“With all the showers that come with April don’t forget to give your chickens a spot to keep warm and dry,” said Edward Gates, manager Randall Burkey Co., Inc.

## May–June

As your chicks age, their temperature, feed and space needs will change.

“Consult with your supplier or alternative resources to ensure you are maintaining the proper environment for your flock to thrive,” Geerlings-Perez suggests. She adds that there is no “one right way” to raise birds and everyone finds the approach that works best for them.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “By now the baby chicks you brought home should all be looking like real chickens,” said Edward Gates, manager at Randall Burkey Co., Inc.

“The chicks are getting big and it’s time to move them outside!” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

## July

Providing plenty of water and ensuring your coop has proper ventilation is a must for proper chicken care. Lockhart says that any birds 16 weeks and older should be on layer feed and supplemental [oyster shell](#). Layer mash consists of more calcium, which is essential for the hen’s body to produce plentiful eggs

with strong shells. To help with the summer heat, Lockhart recommends shade cloths or misters as needed.

*Expert Advice:* “Getting into the warmer months make sure your chickens have a place to cool down,” Gates says.

## August

Your flock should be reaching around 17 to 20 weeks of age by this time which is about the earliest you can start to expect eggs. “If your coop is enclosed, it is also a good idea to give your flock additional light which encourages egg production,” Geerlings-Perez says. “Do not be alarmed if you do not see an egg in August — some breeds can take as long as 28 to 30 weeks to begin production and environments can prolong production as well.”

As you have invested so much time and resources, double check your coop and nest box areas for any gaps that predators would weasel into. Checking with your local supply store can help determine what types of equipment will be the most helpful for common predators in your area.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “Make sure to start checking for eggs. Could be any day now!” said Edward Gates, Manager at Randall Burkey Co., Inc.

“As the days start to get shorter, second season and older birds will begin molting. Don’t panic, it’s natural and normal!” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

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## September

Once egg production has begun for your flock, there are a couple things to remember. “Eggs will start off small as the bird’s body adjusts to this change,” Geerlings-Perez says.

It may take several weeks for the color and/or size to reach what you may have been expecting from the breed you ordered. “It is also important that you collect your eggs regularly — we often recommend twice daily,” Geerlings-Perez adds.

If a chicken accidentally breaks an egg, they may realize that eggs are good eats.

“Once egg pecking begins, it can be a very difficult habit to break and the best way to avoid it is by getting their eggs out frequently,” Geerlings-Perez says.

As the days begin to get shorter, providing additional light can also encourage and maintain egg production.



*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “Molt will continue, and now is also a great time to check and treat birds for any parasites,” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

## October-November

“Enjoy your eggs,” Geerlings-Perez advises. “This is what all of your planning, research, preparation and chicken care is for. Nothing beats fresh eggs for breakfast and there is rarely a lack of demand for real-deal farm fresh eggs — from customers, friends, or family.”

In a perfect world and with proper chicken care, a healthy hen should produce about one egg a day, but there are many factors to consider. “Realistically, depending on breed and environment, you should be able to expect a laying percentage as low as 60 percent to as high as 90 percent,” Geerlings-Perez says.

The low end would be more typical for fancier, more exotic type egg layers whereas the high end will be mostly your production hybrid type breeds. I choose to keep fancy bantam chickens because of their pet-like temperament and small size — and the eggs for me are an added bonus. If you are experiencing a laying percentage significantly lower, your flock may be experiencing low lighting conditions, improper nutrition or stress from the environment. Contact your supplier or reference *Backyard Poultry* magazine which will lead you to the proper sources.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “All done with your pumpkins from Halloween? [Chickens love eating pumpkins](#) before they rot,” said Edward Gates, manager Randall Burkey Co., Inc.

“Your birds will need 15 hours per day minimum to continue to lay through the winter. Now is a great time to also winterize your coop,” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.

## December

Proper chicken care in the winter means making sure your flock’s water doesn’t freeze when the temperature start dropping outside. The end of the year would also be a good time to begin thinking about your needs for the following year.

Hens are most productive in the first year of laying and many breeds will produce very well their second year.

“Laying percentage will drop very noticeably by the time they reach three years of age,” Geerlings-Perez has noted. At what point you decide to replenish your flock will depend on your egg needs and attachment to your flock. Once you are ready to replenish, you begin the process again — no longer as a rookie, but as a poultry proprietor.

*Chicken Care Expert Advice:* “Of course the chickens get a present for Christmas!” said Edward Gates, manager Randall Burkey Co., Inc.

“Pick up eggs often to avoid freezing/breaking/egg eating hens. Make sure water is available with heated water stations,” said Twain Lockhart, Nutrena Poultry Specialist.