

Management Requirements for Laying Flocks

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Best Breeds To Raise: Commercial White Leghorn-type hybrids produce white shelled eggs and are the most economical converters to feed to eggs. Commercial production Reds or Sex-linked hybrids will produce large brown shelled eggs and are usually preferred for small family flocks. Production Reds or sex-linked hybrids also produce meaty carcasses as well as a good supply of eggs. The brown egg laying hybrids tend to be more docile than white egg layer hybrids. Pure bred poultry will lay eggs, but they are not as efficient.

When To Purchase Stock: If you prefer to raise your flock from chicks, it is recommended that you start the flock in late spring to reduce the cost of heating. Purchasing started pullets, birds are 18-22 weeks of age and are ready to lay, is usually the easiest and most economical method. If you start with chicks, brood them at 95°F. the first week and then decrease the temperature 5 degrees per week until the temperature reaches 70°F. It is best to bring laying hens into production around 20 weeks of age.

Floor Space: At least 1.5 square feet per bird.

Litter: Keep three (3) to six (6) inches deep. Remove wet litter as needed. Pine shavings provide best litter but any absorbent material with minimal dust will do. To prevent leg problems DO NOT start chicks on slippery surfaces, like newspaper.

Feed: Feed a completely balanced ration. Feeding table scraps or whole grains can decrease production. Feed an 18 to 20% protein starter for the first 6 to 8 weeks, then feed a 14 to 15% protein grower or developer to 20 weeks of age. After 20 weeks of age feed a 16 to 18% protein layer ration. Feed grit and oyster shells free choice in separate feeder.

Feeders: Three (3) inches of feeder space per birds. The lip of the feeder should be level with the birds back height to prevent feed wastage. Only fill trough feeder 1/3 to 1/2 full in order to minimize feed wastage.

Waterers: Any container that provides at least 5 gallons of water for every 100 birds daily. Provide 1" of water space per bird. Clean the waterers and provide fresh water daily. Place the waterers so that the lip is level with the birds back.

Ventilation: Windows or a fan should provide adequate ventilation to keep the pen dry.

Lights: One 25-40 watt bulb located above the feed and water area at ceiling height for each 40 sq. feet of pen. Provide 14 to 16 hours of light per day for maximum year round production. Never decrease the lighting period on birds in production or they will stop producing. You will have to add lights in the fall or winter. An inexpensive time clock can be installed to turn lights on in the morning hours and let the

birds go to roost with the natural sunset.

Roosts: Six (6) inches per bird. 2"x 2" spaced 12" apart work well. Place roosts 24" above the floor.

Nests: Provide one 10" x 10" nest for every 5 hens in your flock. Place nests 24" above the floor and away from the roosts. Keep the nesting material clean and dry. Collect the eggs often (2-3 times daily).

Yards: Not necessary, but if desired, confine the birds to an exercise area which provides 5 to 10 sq. feet per bird.

Reviewed by Audrey McElroy, associate professor, Animal and Poultry Sciences