

The Cluckertown Newsletter Presents

Getting Your Flock Ready for Winter

For Our Towns Chicken Tenders

As the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, it's time to prepare your chicken coop and flock for the coming winter. Winterizing your coop and ensuring your chickens stay healthy and comfortable is key to a happy and productive flock. This guide will help you get ready for the cold weather by addressing common issues and offering practical tips.

1. Coop Preparation: The Winter Makeover

A draft-free, well-ventilated, and dry coop is essential for your chickens' health.

Seal Up Drafts

Walk around your coop and check for any gaps or cracks, especially at the base and around windows and doors. Seal them with caulk, foam sealant, or strips of wood. Drafts can cause frostbite and respiratory issues. Avoid sealing the top of the coop, as proper ventilation is still necessary.

Ensure Proper Ventilation

While sealing drafts is important, good ventilation is crucial to prevent moisture buildup. Chickens release moisture through breathing and droppings, which can lead to frostbite and respiratory illness. Ensure vents are placed near the top of the coop, above roosting bars, to allow warm, moist air to escape.

Deep Litter Method

The deep litter method helps keep your coop warmer and manage waste during winter. Add a 4–6 inch layer of pine shavings, straw, or other carbon-rich material to the coop floor. As chickens scratch and waste breaks down, microbial activity generates a small amount of heat. Rake the surface occasionally and add fresh bedding as needed.

2. Chicken Care: Keeping Your Flock Healthy and Happy

Your chickens' needs change slightly during winter. Providing proper care helps them thrive.

Water Management

This is one of the biggest winter challenges. Chickens need constant access to fresh water, which can freeze quickly. Consider heated waterers, heated bases for metal waterers, or rubber tubs that are easy to de-ice.

Frostbite Prevention

Roosters and breeds with large combs and wattles are especially susceptible to frostbite. Ensure roosting bars are wide enough for chickens to cover their feet with feathers. On extremely cold nights, apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly to combs and wattles.

Extra Calories for Warmth

Chickens require more energy to stay warm in winter. Offer a small amount of cracked corn or scratch grains in the afternoon to aid overnight digestion and warmth. Avoid overfeeding to prevent obesity and reduced egg production.

Egg Production and Light

Egg production often decreases as daylight hours shorten. To maintain consistent laying, provide 14–16 hours of light daily using a timer and low-wattage LED bulb.

3. Common Winter Issues and How to Deal With Them

Respiratory Issues

Damp, poorly ventilated coops can cause respiratory illnesses. Maintain a clean, dry coop with excellent airflow. If wheezing or coughing occurs, isolate the bird and consult a veterinarian if symptoms persist.

Reduced Foraging

Snow-covered ground limits natural foraging. Supplement diets with chopped vegetables such as cabbage, kale, or pumpkin to provide nutrients and enrichment.

Boredom and Pecking

Chickens can become bored when confined indoors, leading to bullying or feather pecking. Provide enrichment by hanging vegetables, tossing leafy greens, or offering safe objects to peck.

By taking these proactive steps, you can ensure your chickens remain safe, comfortable, and healthy throughout the winter.

References

- The Old Farmer's Almanac – Deep Litter Method for Chicken Coops
- Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maine – Winterizing Your Flock
- University of Georgia Extension – Winter Care for Backyard Chickens