

## Starting with Chicks: the First Month

Are you ready to pick up your chicks? They are only a day or so past hatching. It's normal to lose a few (1 to 2%); good management may reduce that. Here's a quick guide.

1. **Chicks:** Are they healthy to start with? Alert, clean, uniform chicks are likely to be healthy. If not, talk to the feed-store personnel.
2. **Transport:**
  - a. Take chicks straight home from the feed store.
  - b. Transport in boxes with adequate ventilation, NOT the trunk of the car.
  - c. Keep away from chemicals and chemical odors.
3. **At home:**
  - a. Buy a thermometer, and put the chick's box in a draft-free place.
  - b. Use a heat source (lamp, gas, or electric brooder).
  - c. For the first 3 days, at chick level, the container should be about 92–95°F.
  - d. Then, reduce to about 90°F for a week, and by about 5°F per week.
  - e. If chicks are huddling up, it's too cold or too hot. Adjust accordingly.
4. **Keep the litter clean and dry.** Pine shavings are best.
  - a. If it smells like ammonia, remove wet litter and improve the ventilation.
5. **Space:** about one-half square foot per chick in the first few weeks.
  - a. Young chicks need about an inch of feeder space and one-half inch of waterer space each.
  - b. This doubles and triples as they go to 2 and 3 months or older.
6. **Feed and water:**
  - a. Be sure clean water is available when the chicks arrive. Clean and refill waterers daily.
  - b. Use a starter feed to about 5–8 weeks old:  
broiler starter for broilers, pullet starter for pullets or breeders.
  - c. Either mash or crumbles will work fine for the starter feed. Any time you change feed type, make the change gradually, over a week or so.
  - d. Gradually start changing to appropriate grower feed at 5–8 weeks.
7. **Beyond the first month,** plan for the use of your chickens: layers versus broilers have very different needs.

For more information, please browse  
[extension.umaine.edu](http://extension.umaine.edu)

### Other good references:

Gail Damerow, *A Guide to Raising Chickens* (Storey Books, 1995)

Leonard Mercia, *Storey's Guide to Raising Poultry* (Storey Books, 2000)