



Step 6 – Brooder

With the chicks all hatched, dry, and ready to leave the incubator we can now transfer them to their new home.



INTO THE BROODER

Heat on, feed and water readied

Your chicks must be hungry and thirsty after 48hrs in the incubator

Start by plugging in your heat plate and give it around 30mins to warm up. Position the heat plate on one end of the brooder - not the center - so there is a warm end and a cooler end. In the meantime you can fill the feed and water dishes using the supplied chick starter food and the water you have left on the counter so it's room temperature. Place the water dish near the heat plate so the chicks don't have to venture far to get a drink. The feed dish should be close, but give priority to the water dish if space is limited. Chicken water dishes are fairly large but if you have quail chicks the feed and water dishes are tiny and should fit beside each other.

Once your heat plate has warmed up we can begin the transfer. Unplug your incubator dome, but leave the dome sealed for now. You may want to, very carefully, move the incubator closer to the brooder - or even place the incubator inside the brooder. Once the dome is lifted out the chicks may enthusiastically spill out of the incubator and scatter to the four winds. Placing the entire incubator inside the brooder tote leads to the chicks spilling out inside the tote, which can be a lot easier to deal with - if you decide this is the best option than place the incubator on the side opposite to the heat plate. You will want to keep track of the chicks once the dome is opened.

Open the dome and, one by one, carefully pick up the chicks and dip their beaks into the water dish. This can be a bit awkward but it tells the chicks immediately that this is where their water is. If you are uncertain whether a chick's beak was sufficiently dipped, it isn't critical. Once their beak is dipped in the water, place them under the heat plate. When we were preparing the brooder we adjusted the heat plate to be tilted so the lower end is towards the end of the brooder closest to the plate - when we place the chicks under the heat plate we are placing them under the higher part of the heat plate, right beside the water dish.

Once the chicks discover the feed dish the other chicks will take notice and venture over for their first meal. Similarly, any chick that didn't have their beak thoroughly dipped will see the other chicks drinking and also begin to drink.

PACKING UP THE INCUBATOR

Incubator, bottles, cord

Now that the incubator is no longer needed, pack it up

Once all the chicks are in the brooder set the incubator to the side with all of the parts for pickup. You do not need to remove shell bits or try to clean the incubator - it will be cleaned and sanitized once it returns to Pips Farm, and we have the appropriate supplies to ensure the next batch of chicks won't be exposed to chemicals that are toxic to birds.

Don't forget to return the rotating disk we removed for the hatching stage. Once the disk is back on the incubator base you can coil up the power cord and place it on top. Once the dome is set on top of the base it will hold the cord, and all that remains is placing the two empty water bottles back into their respective ports, and store the whole package in a safe place ready for pickup.

REFILLS

Please sir, can I have some more?

Chicks have a big appetite and those dishes need to be filled

You've got your container of water on the counter and a bag of feed that won't run out before the chicks are returned to Pips Farm. Extra feed is given because chicks have a tendency to tip feeders, use the bathroom in them, and a lot of feed needs to be discarded or is lost in the shavings. We do not provide a feed tower, which is a regular feeder that has a plastic container attached that stores extra food, and the reason is that newly hatched chicks sometimes make their way into the feed dish and wind up inside the plastic container.

If you have chickens the feed and water dishes are large enough that a top up on Friday should last until Monday - with quail the feed and water dishes are really small to reduce mortality and unfortunately they may need to be refilled during weekend hours. As tempting as it may be to provide them with a larger container to last a couple of days, that dramatically increases the mortality rate and you could be doing more harm than good. Stick to the provided feed and water dishes provided - the chicks are only in your care for 7-10 days, depending on when they hatch, so it would only be inconvenient for one weekend.

Quail feed and water dishes can be refilled as often as three times per day. Twice minimum. All living things have a genetic potential and animal husbandry practices impose limiting factors on that potential. Neglecting to refill feed and water dishes at this critical time in their development almost certainly reduces their potential and can produce adults that are underweight or have reduced vigor.

ADJUSTING THE HEAT PLATE

Getting that height just right

As your chicks grow the heat plate may need to be raised

You can monitor the comfort level of the chicks by watching where they tend to congregate, and adjust their conditions accordingly. Chicks that are too warm spend a lot of time on the side of the brooder opposite of the heat plate. Chicks that are too cold will never leave the shelter of the heat plate. Because the plate produces a consistent heat you must raise it or lower it to adjust the temperature for the chicks. If they never seem to sit under the heat plate it should be raised, or the tilt increased, so they can comfortably spend time under it. If all of the chicks spend most of their time under the heat plate it should be lowered, again with a good tilt, and often this means the plate itself is low enough to touch the backs of the chicks.

They will tell you what they need by this behavior, and in the instance that they are hiding under the heat plate even after it is low enough to contact them at its lowest point, you may need to consider adjusting the

ambient temperature of the room itself. The heat plate only does so much and the design of the plate assumes the location of the brooder will be around room temperature, or ~20°C.

At no point should you introduce a secondary heat source such as a heat lamp, move the heat plate into the middle of the brooder, or place a space heater beside the brooder to warm it up. The chicks need cool as much as they need warm, and keeping one side of the brooder at room temperature allows the chicks to regulate their own temperatures by moving from one side of the brooder to the other.

