

## CARE OF A SMALL FLOCK OF CHICKENS

*Daniel K. Andrews, Extension Poultry Scientist*

### The Chick

**Care for a Baby Chick.** Newly hatched chicks are well equipped to care for themselves. In nature they would have their mother to keep them warm and dry, protect them from enemies, show them where to find water to drink, and the proper bugs and grains to eat. When you act as a foster mother you must provide for all of these things.

The chicks hatch after 21 days in the incubator. They dry off, fluff up, and start walking in about 12 hours. At hatching time they have a 3- to 4-day food reserve inside their bodies. One day's supply of this food is usually used by the time they have been processed at the hatchery; sometimes three days have elapsed before you get them. You should feed and water them immediately.

Before the chicks arrive, prepare a cardboard ring as high as you can easily step over (16-18 in.) and several feet larger than the brooding area. Make it easy for yourself to tend the chicks while at the same time preventing any corners for them to crowd into or places for the chicks to hide or chill.

**Provide Heat.** Chicks need a warm, dry place to rest. With a small number of chicks, place a gooseneck desk lamp over one corner of a big box. A 75-watt bulb 8 to 10 inches from the litter will provide enough warmth to satisfy 10 baby chicks in a home or basement where room temperature is about 70°F. As the chicks grow, raise the lamp.

A 250-watt, infrared heat lamp with a red globe is suitable for 25 to 50 chicks in an unheated building when outside temperatures are above freezing. Radiation from an infrared lamp warms only the objects to which it is directed; it does not warm the air. This type of bulb has a very hot base and should be used only in a porcelain socket and suspended by a chain. Do not be careless in hanging this lamp as it will cause a fire if it is allowed to touch any flammable surface or fall into the litter. Start the chicks with the lamp approximately 15-18 inches above the floor.

**Building a Brooder.** The small stove or heated box under which the chicks go for warmth is called a brooder. The brooder is placed in the center of the pen.

One may make a small brooder by attaching several porcelain sockets to the inside of a wooden container about the size of an apple box. Several 60- to 75-watt



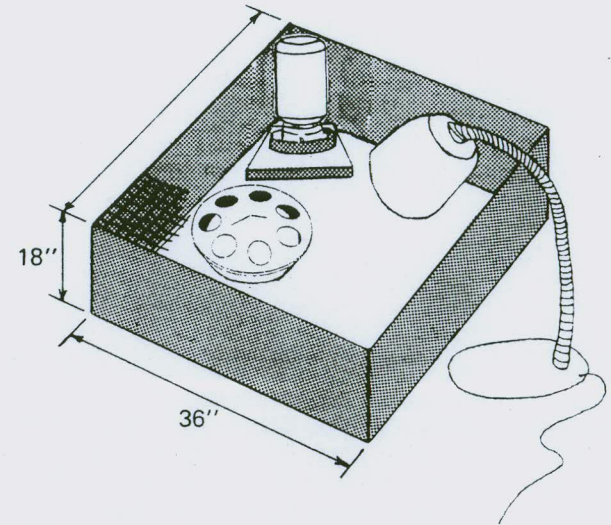


Figure 1. Miniature brooding unit; improvised home for 10 to 12 chicks for 2 to 4 weeks. Wire floor may be used for longer rearing period.

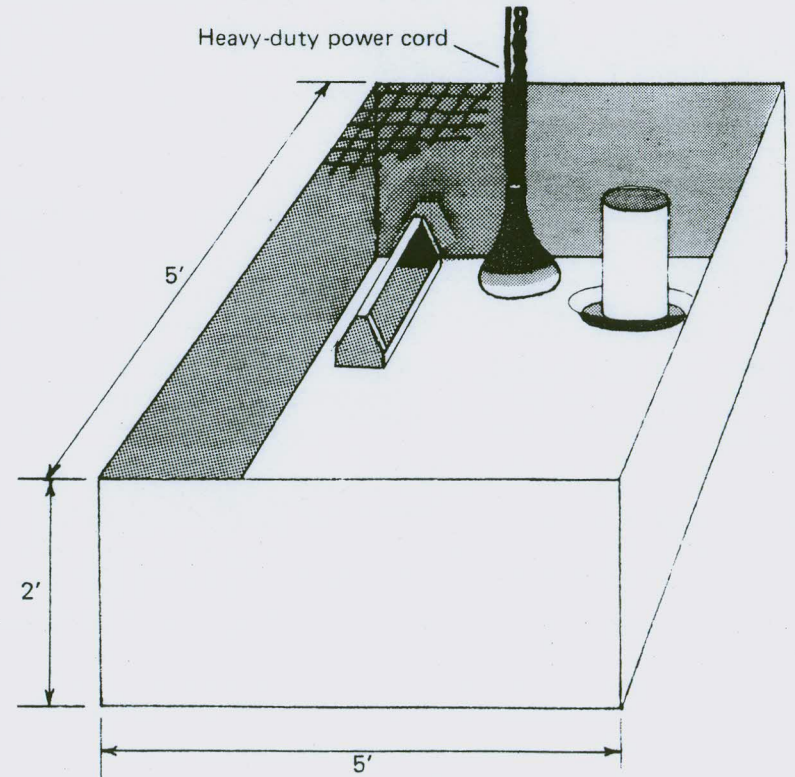


Figure 2. A chick brooder for 25 chicks through 8 weeks of age.

