

Embryology FAQ

How are fertile eggs cared for prior to incubating?

Since most eggs sold at the grocery store are infertile, you will need to purchase eggs for this project from a breeding farm. Check with your local UC Cooperative Extension office or feed store for a list of suppliers. Eggs should be stored with the big end up or laid on their side. Eggs that are clean when they come from the nest are best for hatching. However, it is best NOT TO WASH eggs, since the bacteria on the shell and in the water may easily enter the eggs and cause them to rot. Keep the eggs at 50° to 60°F, do NOT refrigerate.



How long can I keep fertile eggs before incubating?

Ideally, eggs should not be more than seven days old when they are set (placed in the incubator). Hatchability will decline with older eggs.

Why do the eggs need turning?

Turning assists proper development of the embryo and helps prevent the embryo from sticking to the shell membrane, which will occur if left in one position too long.

Can I encourage students to bond with certain eggs?

To avoid disappointment, it is best to wait until the chicks have hatched before the bonding of students with chicks. A 60% hatch is a good hatch rate, thus some eggs do not hatch.

Can I help the chick crack out of the egg?

It is NOT recommended. To do so frequently kills the chick, as you will usually break open the Chorio-Allantoic Membrane (CAM) vessels which causes the chick to bleed to death. It is best to let the chick hatch on its own.



When do the chicks leave the incubator to go into the brooder box?

The baby chicks stay in the incubator for the first 24 hours. The yolk inside the chick will serve as its food and water. Be certain to dip the chick's bill in the water and then tip the head back as you place them in the brooder box to help them know the location of water and how to drink. The brooder should be warm and dry and have a heat source for the newly hatched chicks along with chick starter feed and water.

How do I prevent spraddle?

The best "bedding" for the first few days is an old bath towel or piece of cloth such as an old T-shirt. Good footing when the babies are small helps their legs to develop properly. Don't use hay or straw, as it sticks to them and is harder to clean. Don't use newspaper for the first week or two as they tend to be unable to get their footing and sometimes this causes "spraddle" or "splayed legs". This condition is caused by poor traction with the feet and legs sliding to the side permanently stretching the tendons. This condition makes it impossible for the baby to stand up correctly and can be permanently crippled.

How long can the chicks remain in the classroom?

The brooder box will need a screen over it to keep the chicks in as they will have developed adequate wing feathers to fly up and perch on the edge of the brooder box when they are two weeks old. By this time they can cause dust and odor and it's best to relocate them to new homes.

How do children go about raising a baby chick?

A "Chick Care" leaflet is available to distribute to parents to inform them as to the needs of baby chicks. Chicks are social creatures, they appear to be more content when with another chick as a companion. It is often easier to raise at least two chicks together. Parents need to consent to this big undertaking.