

INCUBATING & HATCHING EGGS

The Children's Farm at The Center is happy to help your classroom or homeschool group incubate and hatch eggs! Hatching eggs gives children the opportunity to learn about chickens and their development as well as the care and time it takes to raise a healthy chick. Though incubating and hatching eggs is not an overly difficult process, it does take some preparation, planning and daily attention to achieve a successful hatch. Below is some information about the process of obtaining eggs from The Children's Farm. Additionally, there are instructions on care of eggs during incubation and for chicks once they have hatched.

What does The Children's Farm provide?

For a \$25 donation to our non-profit farm

- ❖ 6 fertile eggs
- ❖ Small bag of starter chick feed
- ❖ A loving home for your chicks once they hatch*

What do I need to provide?

- ❖ An incubator
- ❖ Food & water dishes
- ❖ Heat source to keep chicks warm
- ❖ Bedding and an enclosure for your chicks
- ❖ 21 days worth of care for the eggs
- ❖ 3-7 days worth of care for the chicks

**We will take all chicks that hatch from our eggs back to our farm. We request that school groups book a farm tour that corresponds (approximately one week later) with the hatch date of your classroom eggs. As a class, you can then bring your chicks back to the farm on the day of your tour. Your \$25 egg donation will be credited to your tour invoice.*

How do I begin?

Step #1: Call us to arrange an egg pick up day. Our number is (708) 361-2434.

Egg reservations begin February 1st. If you have a specific hatch date in mind, we recommend calling early to make your reservation as spring months do fill up quickly. Colder temperatures do affect the hens laying cycles so quantities are very limited during the spring season.

Step #2: Set up your incubator

(Begin this set up about a week before your scheduled egg pick up as it often takes several days to get the temperature and humidity to the correct levels.)

- **Temperature:** Your incubator needs to keep a consistent temperature of 99°-101°.
- **Humidity:** 40-50% humidity must be maintained for the first 18 days of incubation. 65-75% humidity is needed for the final days before hatching.
- **Ventilation:** Incubators need to have holes or vents that allow fresh air to circulate. (Any manufactured incubator you purchase will have accounted for this.)
- **A high quality thermometer & hygrometer are the most important tools of incubation!**

Step #3: Pick up your eggs

- Hatching rates on our eggs are usually in the 75%-90% range.
- **Do not clean or wash your fertile eggs.** They will have a natural coating that is vital to the success of the embryo.
- Eggs can be kept at room temperature for up to three days before putting them in your incubator. We recommend incubating your eggs as soon as possible.
- Do not refrigerate or heat your eggs before putting them in the incubator.

Step #4: Incubation

- It takes 21 days for an average egg to hatch once incubation has begun.
- Carefully monitor temperature and humidity level inside incubator to make sure you stay in range.
- If your incubator does not include an automatic turner, be prepared to turn your eggs daily, mimicking the standard method of a sitting hen.
 - Draw an “X” on one side of the egg and an “O” on the other. This is the easiest way to keep track of which eggs have been turned and when.
 - At least three times a day, gently turn your eggs. The more you turn them, the better, but the number of turns in a day should always be odd so that the eggs are never resting on the same side for two consecutive nights.
 - Continue turning your eggs until day 18, then leave the eggs alone until they hatch.

Step #5: Hatching

- In the final days, you may notice the eggs shifting about on their own as the chick inside becomes active.
- The chick will eventually peck a small hole in the large end of the egg and take its first breath.
- It’s normal for the chick to rest for 6-12 hours while its lungs adjust before continuing to hatch.
- Try not to help with the hatching process. It is easy to cause injury.
- Once the chick is out of the egg, let it dry off completely inside the incubator before moving it into a brooder.

Step #6: Raise your chicks

Brooder

- The chick's first home will be a brooder. A brooder is simply a device or structure used for the rearing of young chicks. There are lots of ways to make your brooder. A plastic bin, kiddie pool or glass aquarium are all popular options.
- For very small chicks, paper towels over wood shavings is the recommended bedding for your brooder. Newspaper is slippery underfoot and can cause foot or leg problems in chicks. The litter should be changed out every couple of days, and never allowed to remain damp - cleanliness is VERY important at this stage.

Temperature

- Your brooder can be heated by using a light bulb with a reflector cover. These are available at any hardware store. A 100-watt bulb is usually fine, however some prefer to use an actual heat lamp bulb.
- The temperature should be 90-95 degrees for the first week in the warmest part of the brooder and should be reduced by around 5 degrees each week thereafter. A thermometer in the brooder is helpful, but you can tell if the temperature is right by how the chicks behave. If they are panting and/or huddling in corners farthest from the light, they are too hot. If they huddle together in a ball under the light, they are too cold. You can adjust the distance of the light (or change the wattage of the bulb) until it's right. Make sure you always have cooler spots in the brooder where the chicks can cool down if they feel the need to.

Food & Water

- Once chicks are in the brooder, they should always have access to fresh water. Place the water as far away from the heat source as possible. If using a bowl, fill it with marbles or clean pebbles to help prevent the chicks from drowning or getting too wet if they fall in.
- Your chicks will also need access to feed daily. We will provide you with enough feed to last your chicks one week. They have a natural tendency to scratch at their food, so feeding on top of shavings can make for a lot of waste. We recommend getting a poultry feeder to help cut down on waste.

Step #7: Bring them back to The Children's Farm