

# How to Choose Chicks for Your Flock



Is it time for you to choose chicks to add to your flock? Maybe you are going to choose chicks based on egg laying, or breed characteristics. Perhaps you are looking to increase one particular breed in your flock. When you get to the feed store, how do you make a decision on which chicks from the bin, should go home with you? What breeds will serve your purpose? And, what if you choose a rooster?

There are some important considerations when choosing chicks from the bin. Before heading out, know how many chickens your coop and yard can support. Be aware of the local laws on chicken keeping and the number you can legally keep. Some breeds grow larger than other breeds. Larger hens are obviously going to take up more space in the coop! Even though

the weak little chick sitting in the brooder may look like it needs saving, try to choose the healthier looking, active chicks. It's a sad fact that not all who hatch will grow into chickens.

## The Purpose of the Chicken

Chickens serve more than one purpose on a farm or homestead. They are kept for fresh eggs and for meat. When you choose chicks, keep in mind your purpose. Many egg laying breeds are available in most feed stores and garden centers. Popular egg laying breeds include, Buff Orpington, Silver Laced Wyandotte, Rhode Island Red, New Hampshire, Barred Rock, Speckled Sussex, Ameraucanas, Welsummers, Leghorns, and Australorps.

Meat breeds include Cornish Cross and Freedom Rangers. These breeds gain weight quickly and within ten weeks you are ready to butcher.



Dual purpose breeds can be kept for both egg laying and meat purpose. These breeds are often heavy weight, large breed chickens. Some choose chicks from the following breeds when looking for dual purpose chickens: Brahas, Buckeye, Jersey Giant, White Rock, and Delaware.

Sometimes people choose chicks based on appearance. Chickens are enjoyable to watch. Fancy breeds are sought by people who

are interested in showing chickens, breeding, and just because. Who can resist a fluffy silky, a comical Polish, or the rare Olandsk Dwarf? There are so many beautiful breeds to choose chicks from and that is before we even consider the wide range of bantam breeds available.

## How to Choose Your Chicks at the Store

When you begin looking in the brooder bins of chicks at the store, it can be somewhat overwhelming at first. They all initially look alike! But watch them for a few minutes and you will see some differences. Look for chicks that are easily and frequently moving to the food and water areas. The chicks that are not finding water and food may just need a bit more time or they could be sleepy. All chicks wake up at different times after hatching. The chicks that are freely moving around the brooder are your best bets at this point.



Some stores won't allow the chicks to be handled for safety

and sanitation reasons. If you can hold the chicks, do a quick tip to toe health scan on the chick before choosing it for your flock. Look for the following traits:

1. Clear eyes
2. Straight beak, not twisted or crossed
3. Dry and fluffy downy feathers
4. Legs are straight and strong, feet are symmetrical and the chick can stand easily
5. Vent area is clear of droppings. Chicks commonly get a day or two of clogged vent from sticky droppings. The vent area should be cleaned with a warm wet cloth to soften and carefully remove the clot of droppings. As long as the chick looks otherwise healthy, this isn't a reason to leave a chick behind.
6. Pecking order starts young. Don't be overly concerned if one seems to be a little bully. Wait ten minutes and it might be a different chick doing the same behavior.

## **Can You Rely on Vent Sexing and Wing Sexing?**

Hatcheries rely on trained employees examining the chicks and determining if they are pullet or cockerel. Although some people are quite good at this, the margin for error is still present. Most hatcheries will give between 90 and 100% accuracy. Although you may order and pay extra for a batch of pullets, receiving a rooster can happen.

## **Choose Chicks Based on Egg Color**

**White egg laying chickens** include over 20 different breeds. The most popular or commonly available breeds are:

- White and Brown Leghorn
- California White
- Ancona



- Blue Andalusion.

**Brown egg laying breeds** include:

- Rhode Island Red
- New Hampshire
- Red and Black Sex Links
- Barred Rock
- Partridge Rock
- Orpingtons
- Wyandottes
- And production hybrid breeds.



## **Heritage Breed Chicks vs. Hybrid Breeds**

Heritage breeds, hybrid breeds, Bantams, Dwarf, what do all these terms mean to you when you choose chicks for your flock?

Heritage breeds are purebred chickens of a specific breed. The heritage breeds must adhere to the American Poultry

Association standards with a traceable genetic lineage. The chickens must be from naturally fertilized, heritage breed eggs. These breeds are slower maturing, and true to breed standards as stated in the American Poultry Association.

## **Adding Bantams to the Flock**

Bantam chickens are popular with many people. The Livestock Conservancy defines Bantam chickens this way,

“Most bantams are scaled down models of large fowl and were developed for the pleasure of show.” The Bantams may be smaller but the eggs are still delicious. Use an extra egg for every two eggs called for in a recipe. Many chicken keepers with smaller properties appreciate the small sized Bantams. They don't need as large a chicken coop and they are extremely beautiful birds, just like the full size chickens.

Most of the time, adding a few bantams to a large sized flock will go smoothly. If you see pecking order issues, you may want to consider separating your Bantams from the larger chickens. In most cases, chicks of both sizes, raised together will do well.



## Hybrid Chicken Breeds

Hybrid chicken breeds are a result of crossing two or more heritage breeds. Many of the breeds referred to as sex – link are hybrid breeds, created to be extremely good egg layers. These are the breeds many people will choose for high egg production. Many of these breeds can be sexed at hatch because they are a certain color only found on one sex.





## What Methods Do You Use for Choosing Chicks?

Everyone is looking for their own special flock of chickens so it's a good idea to choose chicks that will work for your purpose. Egg laying rate and temperament differ from breed to breed and chicken to chicken. A little research into the breeds before heading to the store can make the decisions easier.



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Info You Should Know  
When  
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Legs are straight and strong  
Vent area is clear of  
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