

5 Tips For Pecking Order Drama



Pecking order, and the associated drama, is a real phenomenon. If you added new chicks to your flock this year, you are probably going through the steps to safely integrate them into the flock. The chicken flock pecking order will be upset for awhile and drama will ensue. But there are a few steps you can take to minimize the drama.

Understanding Flock Pecking Order

First, understand what the chicken flock pecking order is, and how it helps the flock operate on a daily basis. The chickens in your flock will, for the most part, work this out among themselves. Only occasionally is our interference justified or needed. Chicken flock pecking order keeps peace in the coop. Chickens are smart creatures. They learn to recognize their place in the ranks and for the most part, stick to it. Unless a change is made.



Maintaining a pecking order is actually less stressful for a flock although it may appear harsh when we witness it. Chickens are smart. They learn their place and go on with life, peacefully for the most part.

Make Sure the Chicks Get What They Need

Your pullets will still need appropriate access to a great quality food and fresh water. This will be an important factor as the chicks are introduced to the existing flock. Pecking order rules often call for a senior hen to put the newcomers in their place. This can be as harmless as a gentle peck on the head or escalate to a full attack. Stay calm! While something should be done if chickens are truly attacking each other, overreacting won't help.



Pecking order won't be a problem when you begin the transition

to the full flock, if you use my method. Here's what you will need:

- A metal enclosure made of sturdy wire, fencing, or a dog pen.
- Some sort of cover for the pen, to keep the older chickens from flying into the pullet pen. If the wire is sturdy enough, a sheet of thin plywood will do. In other cases, use a tarp and secure it to the sides of the pen.
- Separate water and feed bowls inside the enclosure. At this point your pullets may have transitioned to a grower ration. This is fed sometimes as a step up from chick starter feed, for pullets not ready for layer feed. The protein level is a drop down from the starter feed but still high enough to support growth and development.
- A place in the chicken run to set up the pullet enclosure. It won't be for long. After a few days you can begin letting the pullets out while you are able to observe pecking order behavior.



More About Pecking Order?

Having multiple feeders or bowls of feed helps the new flock members find plenty of food. The same is true of any herb or grit supplements. Eventually this will calm down and everyone will automatically run to their usual feeding area.



A pen inside the large chicken coop for the grow out chickens.

Who Decides Who Is Acceptable in the Pecking Order

Single combed chickens rank higher in the pecking order than other comb styles. The chickens in the popular group may have similar comb styles.

Adding a few new kids to the chicken flock pecking order upsets the status quo. Remember the new kids in school? Some of the cool kids would make some attempts to get to know them. Then it would be determined if they fit the criteria for being part of the cool kids group.

Foot Injuries in Chickens -Methods That Help Heal

If not they would have to go search for friends elsewhere. It's about the same for chickens. They check each other out. The hens wonder if they will be replaced in the Rooster's affections. Its all quite anxiety producing. Until it all

settles down again. And it will.



Here are a Few Tips to Help Make the Transition as Stress Free as Possible.

1. The chickens will get to know each other a bit through the wire. Don't be surprised to see greedy hens and roosters trying to stick their heads into the pen to get more food! It's all part of the pecking order plan.

This is not the quarantine that you would use for bringing home new chickens, but the method used to introduce your new pullets to the main flock. If you purchase pullets, be sure and quarantine them before adding to your flock.

2. Remove the barrier when you can be present to observe the behavior for awhile. I usually check periodically throughout the first days of adding new flock members.

5 Tips for Chicken

Pecking Order



3. Feed choice. Have plenty of feed (I cover how much food a chicken needs in this post) and water areas set up so that the chickens who get chased away can go to a different bowl. This will help ensure everyone gets adequate nutrition even with mild pecking order issues. When the pullets are still too young to eat layer feed (before 16 weeks), feed the entire flock chick feed or grower feed. Offer plenty of free choice calcium supplement for your laying hens. They will take what they require.

Add Some Private Spaces...



4. Have some places for the timid chickens to hide or go behind, under or into when being chased. Lean a pallet against the fence for a hiding place. A downed tree limb makes a good hiding place for smaller chicks too. Be creative but make sure

the structure is safe for your birds.

5. Unless the pecking and chasing is severe, try to not interfere! It's hard and especially when we have soft hearts ourselves. Unless a chicken is being picked on by many others, and is being held down and pecked, I do not intervene.

Try to remember that we made it out of middle school in one piece! The chickens will survive the initiation into the flock. Good luck with your chicken flock pecking order.

Here's a good article on feeding younger chicks so they have a great start in life too.

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