

Duckling & Gosling Care Instructions

Prior to their arrival

You need to prepare a place for them that will provide the protection and warm environment they need. Usually this is in a barn, outbuilding or garage. If it has had poultry before, it is best to clean and disinfect it. Initially they need about 1/3 square foot per bird. Start with 2 inches of pine shavings or straw for bedding. Place the water in the pen a day in advance so it is not too cold for them initially. Turn the heat on the day before you expect them so the bedding is warm for their arrival. One heat lamp can handle about 35 ducklings or 20 goslings. The lamp is normally hung about 18" (depending on the bulb wattage) from the bedding where it should be 90-95 degrees. There should be some type of solid wall or partition around the pen to prevent drafts (which can be deadly). Make sure dogs, cats and rats are kept out.

They have arrived!

Normally the post office phones when your birds arrive and asks you to pick them up. When you get them home, dip the beak of each bird in water as it is the most important nutrient at this time. Make sure they tip their head back to drink. If they have had a rough journey and seem weak, you may need to check them every 15-30 minutes to give them more water and make sure they are not being run over by the others. If you do have a few that are weaker than the others, it is best to separate them to another part of the brooder until they regain their strength.

The best way to judge the comfort of the bird is to watch them. If they are all huddled under the lamp, they need more heat. If they are all bedded down away from the lamp, the lamp is too low or it is too warm in the room. They should be spread throughout the pen with some eating, some drinking, some sleeping and some playing.

As they grow...

Poultry (and especially waterfowl) grow very fast. Make sure you enlarge their pen as they grow and add clean bedding as necessary.

Typically the temperature can be dropped about 5 degrees a week and turned off during the day by 2-3 weeks and turned off completely by 3-5 weeks in cooler weather. If you are raising them in a warm climate, they may not need extra heat after a week or two. You will just have to observe them. As they grow and add weight you can allow them to venture outdoors for brief periods during the day. Once they are fully feathered they can stay outside all the time (7-9 weeks) though they should still have some shelter from the sun and heavy rains.

Waterfowl can also be very messy with their water. For them it is best to make a wire platform on which the waterer sits. For babies it can be 1/2" hardware cloth and for adults it can be 1" welded wire nailed on to wood cross pieces. This can be placed over a pan for the babies or over a pit in the ground for the adults. The platform should be large enough to extend at least 6" out from the edge of the waterer for the babies and 30" for the adults. With this platform, any spilled water goes through the wire and out of reach. They cannot track it back to the bedding or make a mud puddle with it. Their drinking water stays cleaner, too. All of our birds (from babies to adults) have some sort of wire or plastic platform under their waters to keep their pen or pasture drier.

Ducklings and goslings can be introduced to swimming water as early as one week of age but you must be very careful. They must be able to walk in and out of the water very easily. The water should not be

too cold and they must be able to find their heat lamp for re-warming without difficulty. As they have no oil on their feathers at this age, they cannot be in the water for long periods or they will become waterlogged and chilled. Do not allow this to happen! But this exposure to water speeds the development of their oil gland and they can probably be swimming freely by five or six weeks of age. Just remember, although ducks and geese enjoy swimming, they do not need to swim to lead happy and healthy lives.