

## Feeding Poultry

The most important thing is to feed a good balanced diet. Some birds will gorge food or be picky initially, but a constant supply should allow them to learn to take little and often.

The age of birds affects what you should be feeding. Most birds purchased will already be on layers pellets.

- <5weeks of age- chick crumbs
- 5- 16weeks of age- growers pellets introducing layers pellets also
- >16 weeks of age- Layers pellets

Whole grains such as corn are also a good feed, although they tend to take longer to digest and sit in the crop and stomach for much longer. Therefore they are much better fed in the evening when the hens are resting. Corn is good at providing heat over the winter months, but it can be quite fatty. Grains can be fed from 12 weeks of age when the gizzard has fully developed.

Most chickens love mealworm, sultanas and many fruit and vegetables, but make sure they are given in small pieces. Chickens also love porridge! Unfortunately, feeding kitchen food scraps to chickens, alike pigs is illegal, even if from a vegetarian kitchen. This is due to them being considered a food producing species and therefore there is concern for the spread of disease and human health. Food bought and processed directly for your chickens, that is kept apart from human food and kitchens can be a good supplementary feed and add variety to their diet. This should only provide a maximum of 20% of their daily feed though. Many fresh foods and mashes can also become very sour and unpalatable very quickly, so also feed fresh and remove any if it goes uneaten.

Grit should be provided for all birds in order to help them digest their food. This is due to chickens not having any teeth to chew their food and only having a basic mechanical stomach (Gizzard) to grind up the food. The grit helps the grinding process to be much more efficient. Most grit will also have oyster shell included, which helps with calcium levels, this does not normally need to be provided separately as most good layer pellets will provide enough calcium. Vitamins and minerals do not need to be additionally supplemented. Most birds will get them in their diet particularly if they have access to the outside. They can however be used at times of stress, moulting or breeding.

Most chickens will eat around 120g-150g a day when laying, but only 25g daily if not, each bird will obviously vary. Always provide fresh water. An average chicken will use 30g of grit a month, but many free range birds will pick up grit and stones around their enclosure.

The most important thing is to make sure the food is kept in vermin proof containers and kept dry to prevent spoiling.

