

Eggs and Egg Problems in Poultry

Chickens will mainly lay on long summer days as they need long light hours for egg production to occur. In commercial birds artificial light is provided out of season, but with backyard layers you will find they will produce more eggs in summer than in winter. Eggs are usually around 60g in weight, but can vary enormously in size, shape and colour. Most hens will first start to lay at 16 weeks of age and production starts to decrease from 35-40 weeks of age in commercial breeds.

It takes around 25 hours for a chicken to make an egg, which means that an egg will be laid slightly later each day. When it gets too late in the day the chicken will miss a day or few before re-starting the cycle again.

Egg problems

The shape, colour and size of egg will be dependent on breed, diet and age of bird. Although some variation is normal, sometimes there is a problem with the egg production cycle which causes deformed eggs. Shells may be weak, malformed, an abnormal colour or have pigmentation or deposits present on the shell. There are many causes of this including infections, nutrition, stage of lay and age of bird. Many egg shell problems are caused by respiratory viruses. These viruses damage the eggshell gland causing deformed shells. The first few eggs of each cycle can be abnormal in shape, size or colour, but this should correct itself over time.

Older birds tend to lay odd shaped eggs as the gland muscles become weakened and less effective over time. Calcium and vitamin D3 deficiency can cause issues with shell quality, but this is rare in birds that are allowed outside access. A good layers pellet should provide enough calcium along with access to sunlight. Stress can also be a cause for abnormal eggs; the egg can be delayed and can have a thicker, ridged or wrinkled appearance.

