



Turkey Brooding and Management: Giving Poults a Good Start

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The saying “What starts right, ends right” holds true for turkeys. If you give your young poults a good start, chances are you will have very few problems, if any. Here are a few pointers that will help you grow a successful flock.

- 1. Decide early on the variety you want.** “Large White” and “Broad Breasted Bronze” are large birds. They reach 25 pounds in 24 weeks. “Small White” will reach 14 pounds in 16 weeks. (See Table 1.)
- 2. Buy your poults from a reliable source (an NPIP-certified hatchery) to guarantee good quality, healthy birds.**
- 3. Clean and disinfect housing facilities.** Scrub walls, ceiling, floor and all equipment clean. Dry out the pen thoroughly. Equipment such as

feeders or waterers may be soaked in a solution of household bleach to kill germs.

- 4. Separate poults from chickens and other birds.** Some diseases spread between birds, but while chickens show no signs of the disease, turkeys may develop a serious disease problem (for example, blackhead, chronic respiratory disease).
- 5. Don’t mix birds of different ages.** Different ages have different nutritional needs. Younger birds are also more apt to come down with diseases.
- 6. Provide the appropriate floor, feeder and waterer space** (see Table 2).
- 7. Start and raise turkeys on litter, wire floor or slats.** If poults will be started on litter, cover the brooding area with at least two inches of clean,

Table 1: Turkey Varieties

| Age (weeks) | Large White or Broad Breasted Bronze | | Small White | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| | Live Weight (lbs.) | Cumulative Feed (lbs.) | Live Weight (lbs.) | Cumulative Feed (lbs.) |
| 4 | 1.65 | 2.3 | 1.45 | 2.2 |
| 8 | 6.20 | 10.9 | 4.40 | 7.7 |
| 12 | 11.60 | 23.9 | 8.30 | 17.8 |
| 16 | 16.50 | 41.4 | 12.10 | 31.2 |
| 20 | 21.10 | 63.6 | --- | --- |
| 24 | 25.10 | 85.7 | --- | --- |

Source: L. S. Jensen, Turkey World, January 1977.

Table 2: Average Space Requirements Per Bird

| Age (Weeks) | Floor (square foot) | Feeder (linear inches) | Waterer (linear inches) |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 0-8 | 0.8 - 1.0 | 0.5 - 1.0 | 0.5 - 1.0 |
| 8-16 | 1.5 - 2.0 | 1.0 - 2.0 | 1.0 |
| 16-20 | 2.0 - 2.5 | 2.0 | 1.0 |
| To Market | 3.0 - 5.0 | 2.5 | 1.0 |

Table 3: Turkey Feeding Program

| Age | Type of Feed |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| First 6 to 8 weeks | Turkey Starter (28% protein) |
| 8 to 12 weeks | 22% protein |
| 12 to 16 weeks | 19% protein |
| 16 weeks to market | 16% protein |

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dry and absorbent litter material, such as pine wood shavings or sawdust. Do not use hardwood shavings or hay.

- 8. Keep young poults warm.** They are very sensitive to cold. Check the brooder at least 24 hours before the poults arrive and adjust to 95 to 98 degrees F at two to three inches above the litter surface for the first two weeks. Decrease temperature five degrees F each week until it reaches 70 degrees F, and maintain this level until extra heat is no longer needed (usually at 6 to 8 weeks of age). Use a brooder guard, which will give poults room to move away from the brooder, if needed.
- 9. Provide air flow.** It is as important to have good ventilation without drafts for good air quality as it is to keep the brooder warm.
- 10. Feed them right.** There are many turkey feeding programs available. An easy effective plan is shown in Table 3. Always use fresh feed that has been stored in a dry, cool place for no more than four weeks.

- 11. Use medicated starter and grower feed.** Starter feed should contain Amprol™ to prevent turkey coccidiosis. Grower feed should contain Histostat™ to prevent blackhead. Medicated feed should be replaced with non-medicated feed five to seven days before slaughter. Check the feed label for the exact time required.

- 12. Provide enough clean, cool water at all times.**

- 13. Provide adequate lighting so poults can find feed and water.**

- 14. Round off all corners of the pen with wire netting.** This will prevent piling.

- 15. If you decide to have roosts, allow three inches/bird.** (Roosts are optional for turkeys.)

- 16. Take precautions to reduce pecking injuries.** Turkeys peck each other, which sometimes results in serious injuries and death. Following good management practices reduces the risk of pecking. Avoid crowding and overheating and provide sufficient feeder and drinker space, feed and water. The wounds of pecked turkeys can be covered with wood tar or anti-peck paste, which can be obtained from feed stores. Isolate pecked birds from other turkeys until wounds have healed.

Trimming of beaks at 2 to 4 weeks of age can also reduce pecking. The upper beak is shortened with a hot blade by about a third of its length. The lower beak is shortened slightly less. This method is not recommended for novices. Contact someone who has done it or your local county Extension office for assistance.

- 17. Watch for any unusual signs (such as not eating or drinking).** These may signal a disease problem.

If you have questions about disease prevention, vaccination or management practices, contact your local veterinarian or county Extension office.