



# Winter Care

### Key points:

- Prepare your coop
- Provide extra shelter
- Think mud protection
- Block drafts
- Reduce Ventilation
- Use Extra bedding
- Consider Heating
- Increase food
- Annual moult – things to watch

Chickens are more tolerant to colder weather than you might think, however tolerance levels are dictated by breed. Be mindful of drafts and wet weather for breeds such as Silkies, Bantams and Frizzles.

This care sheet provides advice to help your poultry weather the colder conditions.

### Be Prepared!

Before winter arrives give the exterior wood of your coop a waterproof finish using any sort of fence paint, most of which are water based. Creosote can be used (although this is not readily available and will take much longer to dry out) and many poultry keepers prefer to use this as the coal tar and oils present in the formula can help protect against Red Mite. Just be sure to ventilate the coop fully before putting hens back in.

Predators, like foxes, are more alert in their search for food over winter months. Check all runs, roofs, hinges and catches for signs of wear and tear and replace and repair anything if required.

### In the run enclosure:

**Extra shelter:** It's a good idea to provide extra shelter for both the hens and feed stations for the wet days to come. The run enclosure should ideally have

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a section for the bird to hide away in when it rains. As hens spend a lot of time around the feed area, it makes sense for this section of the run to have the rain protection.

**Think mud protection:** If your run is likely to become muddy, put down either a deep layer of wood chip or bark. Alternatively, a few concrete slabs are handy and easy to keep clean. Provide extra perches so hens can get their feet out of the mud.

This is particularly important if your birds have feathery feet as they can become infectious if not cleaned. Chickens can also get balls of mud build up over their nails which need soaking and carefully removing or they can take the nail off.

### Housing:

**Block Drafts:** Too many cold drafts entering the coop can damage vulnerable parts of the chicken such as the comb. Drafts tend to enter the coop when holes and gaps develop so it is important to make sure you are checking for these and covering them as they appear.

**Ventilation:** Ensure that vents are placed in suitable areas. These are best where cold air cannot directly impact on your poultry – in the roof for instance. You can, if you wish, reduce ventilation slightly as this will reduce damp and drafts, but remember that excessive insulation and a lack of ventilation can raise humidity to dangerous levels (high humidity can lead to frostbite and raise ammonia levels in the coop which can affect the birds lungs) so keep a balance.

**Bedding:** Add an extra layer to what you would usually put down. The bottom layer will act as an insulator and keep some heat in the coop. Placing extra bedding at the entrance of the coop will prevent damp dirt from entering the coop. Help keep bedding dry with a product such as BioDri, it is a super absorbent powder that soaks up the moisture in your bedding and makes it last for longer.

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Note however that using extra bedding may increase the amount of cleaning that is required as damp does begin to appear.

**Heating:** You could consider additional heating in the form of an electric heat lamp. If you do use one, continually monitor the heat of the coop so that it does not become too hot.

Drop the door: not only will this help keep the cold out at night, but will also provide extra protection from predators.

### Food and Water

**Feeding:** In winter months your hens will eat, on average, 1.5 times more than they do in summer so it is important to notice this and keep stocked up.

It is best to feed your birds with Layers Pellets in the winter as this will provide them with all the key nutrients that they require. To help keep your birds warm in the evening feed them some mixed corn. This will fill them up, and with corn being digested at night it will get their digestive system working and generating heat at the coldest parts of the day.



Frozen ground will prevent your chickens getting a lot of their key nutrients, so add counter this by adding grit to your birds diet every fortnight to help them break down and digest their food easier.

**Water:** Remember that if it is really cold drinking water may not defrost in the day. Either empty the drinker before the chickens go to bed and refill each morning or take it inside for night.



## Moulting and Egg Production

**Annual moult:** The annual moult normally starts early autumn. Keep an eye out for pecking and treat accordingly. To protect from frost bite, try adding additives to their water. Keep an eye on combs, feet and wattles for frost bite also and cover with Vaseline to help protect them.

As the moult ends, egg production will fall. To help keep the birds warm try reducing the calcium and protein intake and increase their calories to help keep them warm. Decrease protein by mixing layer rations with corn.

For further advice or if you have any questions about caring for your poultry over winter, please ask one of our knowledgeable Poultry staff



Desiccant Powder & Drying Agent  
Soaks up moisture in bedding



Layers Pellets  
Provide all the necessary nutrients



Mixed Corn  
Feed at night - digestion will help generate body heat



### Need Advice?

With over 15 years of poultry-keeping experience, we are best placed to help with all of your poultry needs.

We aim to give you the best advice possible and the best service possible: novice or experienced we are here to help you.

**Contact us today!**