

A STEADING CODEX FIELD GUIDE

The First 8 Weeks of Chicks

Brooder to coop — the eight weeks that make a steady flock.

Chicks are simple animals with three needs — warmth, clean water, and space that grows with them — and a short window where getting those right matters most. Here's the run, week by week, with the brooder log that catches trouble early.

SC The Steading Codex

Set the brooder up first

Warm, dry, roomy, and running before a single chick is in it.

A brooder is just a draft-free box with heat at one end and room to walk away from it at the other. That gradient is the whole trick — a chick that's too hot or too cold will tell you by where it stands.

Have it running the day before

- Heat: a plate-style brooder heater is safest; if you use a lamp, secure it twice. Aim for ~95°F under the heat in week one
- Water: shallow, clean, with pebbles or marbles in a deep dish so no chick drowns
- Feed: a proper chick starter — nothing else the first weeks
- Bedding: pine shavings, not slippery newspaper (splayed legs); ~½ inch of space per chick that doubles fast

Settling in

Show them water, keep them warm, watch the vents.

As each chick goes in, dip its beak in the water so it learns where to drink. Then leave them be — quiet, warm, dim at night. Chicks piled under the heat are cold; chicks pressed to the far corners, panting, are too hot. Chicks scattered and busy are just right.

Check every chick's rear daily for **pasty butt** — droppings stuck over the vent, which can block it and kill. Gently soften with a warm damp cloth and clear it; it's usually a stress-and-warmth issue that passes as they settle.

*Drop the brooder temperature about 5°F **each week** — raise the lamp or step the heater down — until it matches the outdoor temperature.*

Feathering out

Wings first, then a roost, then more room.

Wing feathers come in first, then the tail. As they feather they need less heat — keep easing the temperature down and give them more floor; crowded chicks pick at each other out of boredom.

Add a low roost bar an inch or two off the bedding. They'll fumble onto it and start roosting at night, which is exactly the habit you want in the coop. Expect short, clumsy test-flights out of an open brooder about now — raise the sides or add a lid.

Growing fast

More space, a change of feed, first trips outside.

They're eating and growing hard now. Keep the starter feed going (a grower ration if your brand splits them), plenty of clean water, and keep doubling the space — a cramped brooder is where most problems start.

On a warm, still day, a supervised trip outside onto grass is good for them — sunshine, scratching, real dirt. Bring them back to the warm brooder before they chill, and never leave young chicks out unattended; everything wants to eat a chick.

Into the coop

Fully feathered, weaned off heat, moving out — carefully.

By six to eight weeks most breeds are fully feathered and can hold their own temperature down to normal outdoor lows — that's the signal they're ready for an unheated coop. Move them once night temperatures are mild and they've had no heat for a few days.

If you're adding them to an existing flock, don't just drop them in. House them side by side, seeing but not touching, for a week or two, then let them mix on neutral ground with plenty of space and escape routes. Older birds sort out a pecking order; your job is to make sure the young ones can get away.

Predator-proof the coop before they sleep in it: hardware cloth, not chicken wire, over every gap; a door that latches against clever paws; and dug-in or aproned edges against diggers.

What to watch, and when to act

Most trouble is warmth, cleanliness, or space — fixed early, fixed cheap.

Pasty butt — clear it, keep them warm and unstressed. **Splayed legs** — from a slick floor; a soft hobble and good bedding usually correct it if caught early. **A chick going quiet, fluffed, and off its feet** — separate it somewhere warm with water it can reach, and watch closely.

Keep the water clean and the bedding dry; that alone prevents most of what goes wrong at this age. When something's beyond a simple fix, a local keeper or a poultry vet is worth the call — this guide is a field reference, not a diagnosis.

Weigh a couple of birds each week if you can. Steady weight gain is the simplest sign that everything else is right.

Brooder log

Age, temperature, feed, and anything that looked off.

DATE	AGE (DAYS)	BROODER TEMP	FEED / WATER	WEIGHT	HEALTH / NOTES	ACTION

YOU'VE GOT THE GUIDE

Now keep the record. The full ledger is *Hatch & Hover*.

The log at the back is one sheet from Hatch & Hover — a 100+ page working field journal for the whole season, not just this guide: structured logs, reference decks, and season reviews. If this helped, that's where the rest of it lives.

See the full journal → thesteadingcodex.com/volumes/hatch-hover
Or the whole system → thesteadingcodex.com/collection