

Lucky Hens Rescue

Eggs Help Sheet

What is the best way to wash and store my eggs?

Your eggs will stay fresher if you don't wash them at all. When your hens lay eggs, there is a natural coating that is laid on top called the 'bloom' that helps keep out bacteria. When you wash eggs, you drive some bacteria in through the pores of the shell, so it's a bad idea to do so as a general practice. If your nests are clean, your eggs should be clean. In fact, fresh eggs don't really even need to be refrigerated if they're going to be used soon. They can be kept at room temperature. If your eggs are very soiled for some reason, some people recommend you use sand, sanding sponges or sandpaper to carefully buff off the dirt, but it's really best not to wash them in water as that can get the bacteria inside the eggshell. Commercial eggs must be sanitized because they are often laid on top of faeces or even worse.

If you do decide to wash your eggs, your solution should be slightly warmer than the egg you are washing to reduce the amount of bacteria you are driving in (as the egg cools, what is not the shell will be drawn inside, and if you have removed the bloom, the bacteria will enter). If you are consistently getting very soiled eggs, though, you might consider changing your flock management practices. Check to see if your hens are sleeping in the nest boxes (and pooping there!) rather than on their roosts. Maybe you will need to change the height of the nests or the roosts, or darken the nests so they will be less inclined to do anything in there other than lay eggs.

Why do I need to store my eggs large end up?

Storing your eggs large end up will keep them freshest. This is because the air cell in an egg is located at the large end, so less moisture will evaporate out of the egg if it is set with the air cell up in the carton (since the pointy end, with egg white closer to the porous surface of the shell, is less exposed to air when it is sitting in the carton). Frankly, though, if you are storing eggs for eating, it probably won't make much difference unless you are storing them for very long periods of time (and we hope you're eating them fresh!).

Why does my hen sometimes lay eggs with ridges halfway down the shell?

You may be describing what is called a "body checked egg." Body checks are ridges or grooves that occur around an egg, usually at the pointed end. They occur more often in older layers, and are not really a cause for concern to the backyard farmer. Commercially, they are considered an aesthetic flaw, but don't have any effect on edibility. Occasionally, the egg will even appear wrinkled all over or even misshapen due to a large number of checks.

Body checks are usually result of the hen's body attempting to repair any eggshell damage caused by stress when the egg was in the shell gland. This normally happens when there are disturbances in the coop. My girls all laid misshapen eggs once after a particularly bad thunder storm, and they were off laying for days after a helicopter flew too low over our house. Night time predators may cause misshapen or checked eggs, too.

My hen's egg shells have rough patches, and sometimes little hard pimples on the shell. Should I be concerned?

If your chicken is young, sometimes rough shells occur for a while until her egg-laying cycle has settled. Older chickens may also lay eggs with rough or pimpled shells. In the winter, sometimes a chicken may be getting excess calcium as laying slows down and they are less able to graze; this excess is distributed over the shell, sometimes in "pimples" or rough patches. You may try increasing high-protein treats like sunflower seeds. (Lots of corn or scratch usually has low protein, and will cause your hens to reduce their laying) Presuming you have oyster shell free choice, any hens that need more calcium can get it.

Sometimes, rough shells will be caused by water shortages, which may happen in the winter if the water freezes. When that happens, the egg sort of 'stalls' in the reproductive tract for a while, getting excess calcium distributed to its shell. The same thing can happen if your chickens are scared by an intruder or even a very loud storm! Chickens can go 'off' laying due to a disturbance, and when they resume their first eggs, may be misshapen, missing a shell or have a very rough shell. This is usually an occasional thing, although older hens are more prone to it. It is not usually a cause for concern.

Why do chickens lay a shell-less egg?

Chickens need a lot of calcium to create good, hard shells, so most incidences of shell-less eggs in an adult hens are related to not having enough calcium in the diet. Young hens may lay a shell-less egg or two right as they begin to lay eggs for the first time, before their systems have "gotten into the groove" of laying. If your girls are on a proper diet of lay ration and have oyster shell free choice, they should have all the calcium they need. They also need Vitamin D and a proper balance of other vitamins so they can process the calcium. Lots of snacks or scraps can throw off the nutrient balance of their diets or give them too much salt.

Disturbances at night while they are sleeping--a predator prowling around, or a big storm, for example, can also sometimes upset their system and cause shell-less eggs. If that is what's happening, some of the other girls' eggs may have bands or "checks" on them, as the laying process was disturbed briefly before resuming its normal course. If disturbances are the problem, when they cease, the shell problems should cease, too.

Another possibility has to do with the salt in their diet. Too much salinity can cause shell-less or thin-shelled eggs. So, sometimes if they are drinking water that is highly softened, it can contain a problem amount of salts for them. It could also simply be a defective shell gland; if that is the case there is nothing to be done about it.

Lastly, infectious bronchitis can also cause thin shelled eggs, or eggs with no shells. Chances are good you would have noticed respiratory symptoms. If you suspect your chicken has a case of infectious bronchitis, you should get her to a vet for a diagnosis immediately. There are some other illnesses, such as egg drop syndrome, that could cause the same thing. If you have eliminated everything else, your vet may be able to help you.

Did you know you can test an egg and get an approximation of its age?

All you need are the eggs and a bowl of cold water, gently drop the egg into the bowl of water.

If it:

- Sinks to the bottom and stays there, it is about three to six days old
- Sinks, but floats at an angle, it's more than a week old
- Sinks, but then stands on end, it's about two weeks old
- Floats, it's too old and should be discarded

Before you print think about the ENVIRONMENT!