

- Speaker 1: [00:01](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. So when it comes to chickens, if I have a choice, I'll almost always pick letting a broody hen hatch her eggs over getting chicks from the feed store. However, that does require one important component, which is something I don't always have. What is it? Well, a broody hen, and in today's episode we are covering all things broody hens. So if you've ever wondered what to do with a hen like this, if you should let her continue to sit on her eggs, how to move her or anything in between, you will love this episode.
- Speaker 1: [00:50](#) I'm your host Jill winger, and for the last 10 years I have been helping people just like you who feel a little uninspired by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you really want by growing your own food and mastering old fashioned timeless skills. All right, so in cases a brand new topic to you, what is a broody hen? Let's cover that first. So we have that baseline. So a broody hen is simply a hen who wants to sit on her eggs and have babies. Seems like it should be like pretty much the most common thing in the world, right? Well naturally that is the case. You know, we see in nature the sparrows and the Robins, they sit on their eggs without a second thought. However, when it comes to our more modern chicken breeds, most of these breeds have had this instinct selectively bred out of them because when a hen goes broody, they stop laying eggs in favor of just sitting on the eggs that they have.
- Speaker 1: [02:05](#) So when we look at the commercial egg industry, imagine if all the hens in the industry insisted on sitting on the eggs instead of laying an egg per day, you know, it wouldn't work out very well. So because of that, over the years, chicken breeders have considered this broodiness tendency to be undesirable and have bred to avoid it. And that's why when we get our hens as chicks from the feed store and they mature, most of us have never seen a broody hen, you know, our, our hens leave their eggs in the nesting boxes and off they go without a second thought. For us personally, let's see, we've had chickens for almost a decade and we've only had a handful of broody hens over the years. And most of these hens have been our Icelandic chickens, which is a heritage breed. They're not super common. They're also pretty much half wild, so they haven't had a lot of this selective breeding take place.
- Speaker 1: [03:16](#) And a lot of that broodiness is still in the hens. Now the downfall to this is that literally the Icelandic are half wild. I'm pretty sure they hate me. They don't enjoy humans, they hate the chicken coop. They try to like get as far away from us as possible and live in the rafters of the barn. So there's things

about them that aren't my favorite. But I do love that the hens tend to want to sit on their eggs. So if you had chickens right now and you've wondered, you know, maybe now or in the past, if you've actually had a broody hen or not, here are a few signs to look for. So a broody hen is usually going to be a little more aggressive. So you might see her sitting in her box or sitting on her eggs a lot and when you go to take the eggs out from under her, she might peck you, you know, maybe she wouldn't peck you normally, but she does now.

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Or she might chase hens away. The other hens that come towards her, you know, she might be really defensive about her nest. Some hens even growl, which is kind of intimidating, but they'll do it if they really mean business. So you might even hear that. Now kind of most obviously a broody hen is not going to want to leave her nest. She might only get up from her spot once or twice a day to grab food or water. Sometimes they don't even seem to get food or water, they just sit there. Um, so depends on how committed that hen is, but they are glued to that nest. Now usually once she has gathered around eight to 12 eggs under her, she'll stop laying new ones. Sometimes though there are exceptions to this rule and they'll keep laying or you'll find this nest that started off with eight eggs and suddenly it has 20 and you're like, which ones are new?

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Which ones are old? That can be a little bit frustrating. I'll give you a tip in a minute on how to work around that. But once she has her collection, she'll usually just sit and stay there. Now once you see this with your hen, you have a couple choices. You can either let her just do her thing and sit there and hatch out those eggs or you can attempt to break her of this broodiness. So let's go through each of these options. You kind of understand what this is going to look like. So option number one, you just let do her thing. Honestly, when I see a hen getting broody, I tend to just let her go and see if she'll hatch those eggs out. Because honestly, I'm basically gonna get free chicks. Because there's, you know, she's going to sit on them. Hopefully she'll hatch them out and I don't have to pay for them.

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And it's awesome because the hens will care for those chicks. So I don't need to have them in an incubator or worry about food and water. It's really hands off for me. The only downside to chicks that are raised from a broody hen is that they're a little bit more skittish around humans. But honestly, I don't really look at our chickens as pets per se. So I'm okay if they're not like climbing up in my lap. So if you decide to let your hen be broody, it's really, really important to wait a couple days just to

make sure your hen is committed to the process. Cause this has happened to me several times and it's really frustrating. So sometimes their instincts will, you know, start off like broody, broody, broody and then they'll kind of go back to normal after a few days. And this depends on their age and their breed and their environment.

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But she will start to sit on them and then stop. And that leaves you with this nest of half developed eggs that you're not gonna want to eat. Or at least I don't because you know, things have started to develop in there. There's a lot of blood, um, you know, not super appetizing. So you're gonna want to make sure she's committed. And if she is, after a few days, she's still there. Here's what to do. So if after a few days she's still intent on being broody, what I would do is just try to leave her alone as much as possible. Now this is kind of important. If you don't have a rooster in your flock, no matter how long she sits on those eggs, they're not going to hatch into chicks because the eggs have to be fertilized. So it kind of goes without saying. If you don't have a rooster, this is not gonna work.

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So what you could do is you could get some fertilized eggs and let her do her thing because she generally won't care if they're her own eggs or someone else's eggs, or at least she can't tell. Perhaps. So if you have a friend with fertilize eggs, you could stick those eggs under her and let her sit on those. I would recommend giving her about 10 of these fertilized eggs if you're going this route and put them under her at the same time so they will hatch together. You may also want to mark the eggs just with like a little bit of a Sharpie, you know, a dot with a Sharpie marker. So you know, if they were the ones you placed, you could also do this with a hen that has her own eggs. Just if she'll let you get under there and it won't break her up, her broodiness or she won't abandon the nest Mark the eggs with a dot.

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So you know that those were the original ones. And if you know halfway through the process, she lays another egg or another egg happens to find its way under there, you'll understand which ones are the original eggs that are full term and which ones probably are the duds that aren't going to hatch with, with the others. And then beyond that, really I just try to leave my broody hens alone. Oftentimes my icelandics will actually sit on their nests far from us under the lilac Bush or they'll be hiding. So I won't even know that they're sitting on a nest until she comes out with chicks someday. Which is ideal for me cause then I don't have to worry about it. And I tend to over manage

her when she's in the chicken coop and being broody. So just try to leave her alone as much as possible.

Speaker 1: [10:03](#) Okay. So option number two, let's say you do not want a broody hen you want the daily eggs, you don't want to worry about roosters fertilizing or babysitting and you want her to be done with the broodiness. So there's a few ways you can encourage her hormones and her instincts to settle down a little bit. So there's a couple of different theories and techniques on how to stop a broody hen. So you'll hear different things recommended. But here are a few of the most common. So number one, you can collect her eggs often, sometimes multiple times per day. So she doesn't get that feeling of a nest right or a collection of eggs. Just keep in mind, you're probably going to want to wear leather gloves when you do this because she's going to be more aggressive than normal and may peck at you. You can also try moving her from the nesting box.

Speaker 1: [11:02](#) If she's very, very committed, you're probably going to have to do this multiple times per day because she's going to go right back. So you know, take her off, put her outside, maybe give her some stuff on the ground to Peck at and see if that'll distract her. At night, you can try gently removing her from her nest and placing her on the roosting bars with the rest of her flock. So chickens, generally at night, they kind of just hunker down and stay put. So if you put her on the bar with her friends, she may just want to stay there with them and not try to go back. You could also try blocking the nest area if you can reach it. Let's say she's being super convenient and she decides to go broody in a nesting box. Maybe take those eggs out and put a board over that box for a while to see if deters her.

Speaker 1: [11:56](#) You can also try it moving her nest. Um, if it's movable right into a well lit area that's a little more noisy, a little more active. Um, a broody hen is craving the dark, quiet, cozy feel. So if you kind of put her in grand central station, she might be like not worth my time. I'm outta here and it might discourage her. And then lastly is she's really, really determined, you might need to try moving her to a dog crate or like a wire kennel if you have a small one. Some people recommend not putting shavings in the dog kennel because they say it helps cool their underbelly and stops the broodiness. I would be very careful putting your chicken on a slick surface without some sort of footing to keep her from hurting herself by slipping in her leg, slipping out from under her.

Speaker 1: [12:55](#) So maybe try some newspaper or something. Um, but you would just leave her in the kennel for a couple of days with food

and water and see if that breaks her. And hopefully when you pull her out of the kennel, you know, she doesn't go back to the nest and she just goes off with her friends and life is normal. Okay. So a little note here about moving a hen. Um, if you decide your hen is going to be broody you decide to let this happen naturally, you do want to consider it location because sometimes your hens will start this process in a less than ideal location where they're going to be susceptible to dogs or predators, um, or it's just not a good place, so you can move her. Um, but keep in mind, it can be really, really stressful to move a hen in this state.

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So I wouldn't do it unless it's absolutely necessary because there's a good chance if you do move her, you're going to break the broodiness and the process will be halted and the, whatever eggs she has are probably going to be half developed and no good. So if you absolutely have to do this, here's how to move a broody hen. So first off, prepare a new nesting area for her before you get started. Make sure it's in a safe location. Maybe a nesting box in your coop or in an enclosed pen where she's gonna feel secure and make sure she has access to some food and water as well. So once you have everything set up, wait until it's dark. So wait, you know, before bedtime she's going to be a little sleepier. Chickens don't see well in the dark and hopefully it will keep her more calm and passive.

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I would recommend putting on some leather gloves, because she might be a little grumpy and then you're to first transport her eggs into the new nest. So pull them out from under her very carefully. Put them in the new nest area, then go back for her and transport her to the nest area. Now when you get ready to set her down, I wouldn't recommend putting her on top of the eggs. Just set her very close to them so she can see them. But she's not going to, you know, if she has a tantrum and she's thrashing and you know, or her wings are flapping, she's not going to crush them. So she, if she can make sure she can see them and know they're there and then hopefully she'll hop on there, um, of her own free. Well, okay, so chicken eggs take about 21 days to hatch, start to finish.

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Duck eggs are a little bit longer, about 28 days. So be sure to Mark the dates in your calendar so you know what to expect. You know, when to start watching. Again, if you're getting close to hatching day, I would not try to micromanage, give her her space, let her do her thing. When you do start to see chicks hatch, resist the urge to go in there and help them. I know it's really, really hard not to go help chip off the shell, but they need to go through that process on their own. And your presence, if

you're in there watching and worrying about, or it can really stress out the hen. Now, the cool thing that is literally my favorite part about broody hens is that once the chicks come out, it's really, really easy for you as the homesteader.

Speaker 1: [16:35](#) You just let the mama do her thing. We had a hen a couple of weeks ago just show up in the barn yard with six chicks. She did it all from start to finish. She's keeping them warm. She's showing them how to scrounge for food and taking care of them. And it's way easier than trying to coordinate an incubator. One thing to keep in mind, once you have a mama with her new babies, you know, ideally if you don't have aggressive dogs or a lot of predators, you can just let them roam around the barn yard, and do their thing. If predators are a bit more of a problem, you know, even with an aggressive protective mama hen, they're very susceptible. Those little tiny chicks to either getting lost or stepped on, or raccoons or foxes. So you may want to transport them into a safe area.

Speaker 1: [17:30](#) There have been several times we have taken our momma hen and her babies and very carefully moved the whole bunch into a brooder and I didn't need a heat lamp or anything like that, but we just kept them safe and together while the chicks got a little bit bigger, a little bit more mature. Otherwise in the past had some issues with chicks just disappearing. I think they're just way too easy targets for the predators or the dogs or getting lost or stuck. So you don't need to do much. Just make sure that they are able to have shelter and protection if they need it. And then it's really fun to watch them do their thing. Our hens will take their chickens in the garden, teach them how to peck. Usually around weeks four or five, she will start to distance herself from the chicks a little bit.

Speaker 1: [18:19](#) So don't be alarmed if you see her kind of encouraging them to go out on their own. Um, but ideally you're going to have a whole new little collection of chickens to add to your flock that didn't cost you any money at the feed store. And you've got to watch the whole process, which really is one of the very best parts of this whole homesteading thing. Holy cow you guys. I'm pretty sure that was almost everything you could ever have wanted to know about keeping raising or breaking a broody hen. I hope it was helpful. If you have any other tips or best practices to share when it comes to broody hens, I'd love for you to post them over on the Prairie homestead Facebook page and share because I know this is a topic, there isn't always a lot of information out there about it.

Speaker 1: [19:12](#) It's a thing if you have chickens, you're probably gonna run into this at some point and it's really helpful to hear from people who've been there done that. And if you are really excited to start your homestead but you're not quite sure where to start or maybe you are ready to get chickens but you're not sure how to set up your coop. I have something you're going to love. I have created an entire library of resources for homesteaders just like you, including a comprehensive chicken coop guide and you can get access for free over at theprairiehomestead.com/grow G. R. O. W. We'll drop the link in the show notes if you want to click on it there as well and that's my friend is all for this episode. I appreciate you, I love hanging out with you here on the podcast. If you have a minute and you're so inclined, I would love for you to jump over to iTunes and leave a quick review so more people can find this podcast and bring homesteading into their lives and that is all for now.

Speaker 1: [20:23](#) Thanks for listening and I'll chat with you on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast. Cheesemaking is one of those things that kind of makes you feel like a home setting rock star. It's just magical to transform an ingredient as simple as milk into all sorts of amazing things like butter and ricotta and cream cheese. The biggest issue I ran into when I was trying to start making these things was finding the right equipment and cultures because let's face it, they don't exactly sell mesophilic starter culture at your local grocery store. One of my favorite resources for home dairy projects is new England cheese making supply company. They have everything you need to turn milk into magical things and I have put together a downloadable quick start guide that you can grab for free over at theprairiehomestead.com/cheese I included my favorite recipes in there, a list of the cheese cultures that I like best and a little discount code to save you some cash on your order. You can grab it at theprairiehomestead.com/cheese.