

- Speaker 1: [00:01](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. So whenever I post a picture of our animals in the snow on social media, whether it's a picture of the horses or the cattle, or the chickens or the goats, every single time I will get a comment from at least someone, sometimes multiple someones who is very, very angry with me for allowing our animals to be outside. So I talk about this on previous episodes, especially in regards to cattle or horses, but large animals have special hair coats that are designed to keep them very, very warm, which is why across massive expanses of the U S you have thousands upon thousands of head of cattle who survive winters, harsh winters, even with zero issue. And they actually thrive during those super cold temps. So we know the horses and cattle and goats are designed to survive outside without a heated barn and without living in your home.
- Speaker 1: [01:07](#) But what about the chickens? We know they're jungle birds. We know they're more suited for a tropical climate. So what do we do with them? Do we need a heat lamp? Do we not eat a heat lamp? Well, in today's episode I'm going to take you into my chicken coop. Tell you what I do and the conclusions I have personally come to after a little bit of research and a whole lot of observation. I'm your host Jill winger. And for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting by modern life. I'll help you create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills.
- Speaker 1: [01:50](#) So I think first off, let's just talk about why we would use a heat lamp for chickens because they're definitely a common chicken keeping practice. You know, all the feed stores carry lots of heat lamp bulbs and accessories. So it's not a fringe thing. It's actually very, very common. But I found that when it comes to animals, especially farm animals, a lot of people follow the same thought pattern that I did back when I first started homesteading. And my thought pattern was, if I'm cold, then my chickens must be cold too, right? And we're, we're kindhearted homesteaders. We want to take good care of our animals. So it's natural. That's a normal thing to feel. We want to make our critters as comfortable as possible. So most of us have a heat lamp or several in our chicken coop just to make sure our birds are warm.
- Speaker 1: [02:45](#) And I actually kept a heat lamp on my birds for many years, especially because Wyoming is brutal when it comes during the winter months. But I shifted my tune just a little bit over the years as did more research, and listen to some chicken experts and made some more observations. So here's the deal. Here's

kind of some of the bullet points that I have come to over the years. So we have to keep in mind when we're thinking about our animals being outside, chickens have feathers, cows and goats have that amazing winter hair and we don't, we don't have feathers, we don't have winter hair. So what we feel and how we deal with the cold is going to be different than our animals. And that might seem like a super obvious thing, but I mean it's not always obvious to everyone. So animals are designed to withstand pretty decent weather conditions without a lot of help from humans.

Speaker 1: [03:48](#) And that's can be hard for us to remember and to accept. But it's definitely true. Now the biggest problem that I have with heat lamps is they are extreme fire hazards, like very, very dangerous in certain settings. And you have, I mean it makes sense because anytime you stick a 250 watt bulb in an area with a whole lot of combustible material like feather dust and you know, just dander and wood shavings, there's a hazard there. Like no one's going to argue with that. And chicken coop fires do happen. We've had neighbors with very devastating fires because of heat lamps. And I've heard of more than one of a barn burning down or chicken coops burning down from heat lamps falling into the bedding or wiring being bad or mice chewing on things and causing issues. So you have to be very, very careful with them regardless of what you decide.

Speaker 1: [04:44](#) But here's the interesting part that really kind of caught my attention when I started to research this. Most of the time chickens don't necessarily need a heat lamp, which I know is a little bit shocking because when we go to the feed store or we look at some of these beginner chicken tutorials, they're like, the first thing you need is a heat lamp. And that's actually not necessarily the case. I'm not just pulling this out of thin air. I promise a lot of chicken experts agree that your average chicken breed, your dual purpose chicken breed, like your Rhode Island red or your barred rocks or any of those, they do just fine without supplemental heating as long as, this is the kicker, as long as they have a way to get out of the wind and to stay dry. And that actually goes the same with our cattle.

Speaker 1: [05:35](#) I've noticed, um, when our cattle can stand up the wind, they can withstand crazy cold temperatures. Even the calves, the babies, the problem that we have with our cows is, especially with brand new babies, if they come out of mama and they're still wet and they don't have a chance to get dry, that's when they can die. And that's when it gets serious. But as long as that calf has a chance to get dried off, usually by mama licking them before, um, the temp gets really, really nasty or the wind picks

up those calves, even the brand new ones are super tough and it kinda, you gotta kind of keep that in mind with your chickens. As long as they can stay dry and have a way to get out of the wind, the colder temperatures themselves aren't necessarily going to be a problem. Now, I'll be honest, maybe you're kind of like raising your eyebrow at me right now.

Speaker 1: [06:29](#) And I was, I was skeptical about this at first as well, until I started paying a little bit more attention to what was happening in my own coop. So I've noticed with my birds, multiple times, this happened more than once. So I do have heat lamps still in my coop. We have ours bolted into the wall. So there is no way they're going to be able to fall off and there's no way that any animal is going to be able to grab a cord and start chewing on it. So I have been gradually weaning myself off of the heat lamps and it really hit me hard a year or two ago when it was, it was cold, it was like well below zero, like 30 below zero with the wind chill. And so I was like, Oh my gosh, my birds are gonna freeze.

Speaker 1: [07:21](#) So I went ahead in the coop and I turned on the heat labs that we have bolted up on the wall. So I turned them on and I was feeling really good about myself because I kept my chickens warm and safe during the cold snap I went in the house, and then right before dark I popped in to check on the chickens one more time before I went to bed. And I was shocked that to see that all the chickens, they weren't under the toasty little heat lamps. They were crowded in the other section of the coop as far away from the heat lamps as possible. And they seemed a little bit annoyed because instead of sitting on their roosts, which is what they should be doing and usually do when it is getting close to dark, they were, they were getting ready to bed down in on the floor away from the heat lamps.

Speaker 1: [08:12](#) And they were, I think they were annoyed with me honestly. So, I ended up turning off the heat lamps and then the next day we've kept the heat lamps off and I went back out at dark and low and behold, all the chickens were on their roosts. They were happy. But they just didn't like those heat lamps. So listen to your chickens, I guess is what I'm saying. Pay attention to their behavior. I think we're going to tell you what they want and what they need. And it usually is not going to be the heat lamps even when we think that it should be. Another interesting observation I've made over the years. We have a couple chickens, they're Icelandic, which is a heritage breed. It's a cool breed, except they hate me. Maybe you've heard me talk about this before. These Icelandic chickens like have no interest in having a relationship with humans.

- Speaker 1: [09:08](#) They just don't care. Like they don't want to stay in the coop. They fly out of our very tall run. They don't lay their eggs in the nesting boxes. They're kind of rude to me when I try to talk to them, just saying, they just don't want to be my friend. So I have caught them and put them in and caught them and put them in over and over and over and they just won't stand. So finally I'm like, cool, go do your thing. You're on your own. So I have these Icelandic, and they never are in the coop. They hate the coop. And so there have been times, like especially last year, it was very, very bitter cold and the wind was insane. I was positive that I would go out the next morning and find a frozen Icelandic chicken on the ground and I never did.
- Speaker 1: [09:53](#) Now the key was the Icelandic, were roosting up in the top of a three sided building we have. So it doesn't have a door, doesn't have heat or it doesn't even have installation. It's just a metal building with an open side. But they're able to get up in the rafters, out of the winds and those chickens, they have survived ridiculous temperatures as long as they're able to get up there. So that further underscored my observations that as long as the chicken can get out of the wind and they're not going to be wet, they're probably going to be just fine. And we've never even had issue with frostbite in those situations. Now granted we don't have a lot of moisture, right? So, wet air is when we get in more of that frostbite issue. But I'm telling you, if they can survive in our 40 below windy blizzard things, then they can survive anything.
- Speaker 1: [10:53](#) So not saying that's ideal, I'm not saying you should necessarily force your chickens to be out finding their own roosts in that cold temperatures. But I don't have a choice with mine and there were just fine. Okay. So all that to say, you probably might not need heat lamps as much as you think, but there are still a few considerations. I want you to keep in mind to make sure your chickens are going to survive the winter being safe and happy. So the big one that you have to watch, even if you don't have heat lamps, is ventilation. So if you want to focus on one thing in regards to chicken keeping, let it be ventilation in your coops. It's a big deal. So one of my favorite natural chicken experts is Harvey usury. Um, and he wrote the book, I think it's the natural flock.
- Speaker 1: [11:44](#) Anyway, anyway, well we can link in the show notes, but it's a great book. It's color, it's paperback. It's a huge, great book. And he says, as long as the are sheltered from direct wind and rain, a coop cannot have too much ventilation, like let that sink in for a minute. That's kind of crazy. A coop cannot have too much of ventilation and it's actually those closed in, damp, moist coops.

Those are the ones that breed pathogens and caused the respiratory issues and make your birds more susceptible to frostbite, which can be a, a real issue. Frostbite is what you gotta be careful of. Now drafts are bad and the difference between a draft and ventilation is a draft is a direct wind blowing on the bird. We don't want that, but there should be air exchange happening in the coop at all times.

Speaker 1: [12:39](#)

So for us, that means that I do leave our coop doors open and all but the very most extreme temperatures, the pretty much the only time I close our coop doors, and I'm not talking about the people door, I'm talking about the little chicken door that we slide in and out. I pretty much only close it when snow is gonna blow inside. Otherwise, I leave those open and let that air flow right. If you have a window at the top of the coop that's away from where it's going to blow directly on the chickens, definitely, you know, prop that window open, let that air come in and out. In addition to ventilation, water is naturally a really big deal, especially in the winter. And it's kinda tough if you probably can relate keeping your chicken's water liquid when it's super cold outside. We use a heated dog bowl, that we plug in.

Speaker 1: [13:30](#)

If you don't have a heated dog bowl, you know, just take a bucket. We have like a bucket brigade. So, we fill it up and then bring anything frozen back to the house and let it thaw in the mudroom. And we just swap out every day to keep things from getting iced over cause ice builds up when it's super cold and it never has a chance to thaw out. But fresh water is really, really important as is food. And we know that the process of digestion create heat keeps the chickens warm, so make sure they have plenty of food to munch on. I have some recipes in my natural homestead book and on the blog for some different flock blocks or some higher fat content, chicken supplements. They are in 100% necessary, but they can be good if you just want to give a little bit of a supplementation or a little bit extra fat to when the cold snaps really hit.

Speaker 1: [14:27](#)

So there you have it. To sum it all up, when it comes to the topic of heat lamps and chickens, and this is a debated topic, so you probably are going to find what not probably, I know you're going to find a variety of of opinions out there on this, many of them different than mine, but my best advice is that you watch your birds and create a plan that works for you and your climate and just remember, chickens are not human. They have different ways of dealing with temperature shifts than we do now. If you want to knit those chickens, sweaters you've seen floating around online, totally cool, you can do that. You know,

do your thing. Just know that it's not necessarily a must have because they are birds. They've got the feathers and they're a whole lot tougher than we think and that's it for today. If you have just a minute, I would be so honored if you would subscribe and leave a quick review over on your favorite podcast player so more people can find this podcast and bring home setting into their lives. Thanks so much for listening. I'll catch up with you next time on the old fashioned on purpose podcast.