

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. TIS the season for an egg famine. Now, I don't know when you're listening to this, but at the time of the recording of this episode, it is January dead of winter in Wyoming. The wind is blowing, it is cold, and it is not the season of bountiful egg production. And this is a very common problem/complaint for chicken owners, of all ages because we pay for the chickens, we pay for their food, we take care of them every day. And it can be a little bit frustrating when there are no eggs for the house. So today's episode, I'm going to help you become a chicken detective and figure out exactly why your chickens aren't laying eggs right now. 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.
- Speaker 1: [01:02](#) I'll show you how to leave the rat race and create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills no matter where you live. So there are a number of factors that can cause a chicken not to lay eggs. And we're going to dive into this list in just a moment. But it's going to take a little bit of detective work on your part in some process of elimination to figure out why exactly your hands aren't laying and it's not necessarily hard. And more often than not it has to do with the time of year and the amount of light. But there can be other factors as well. So I'm going to give you all the information I can and then you can kind of work through the list and decide which one may be affecting your flock.
- Speaker 1: [01:59](#) Right? So number one, this is the most common, especially during the winter. This time of year is lack of light. Chickens need at least 14 hours a day of light in order to stimulate their bodies to lay eggs, right? This is the number one reason that most people, you know, they get into the winter months and they're like, Hey, what happened? I bought these chickens. They're not laying, I have no eggs. I'm buying eggs at the store, which is like the worst thing ever. When you have 30 chickens outside and you're like going to the grocery store with your shame all over you because you are buying eggs. It's just not my favorite, but it happens. We all have been there. It's usually related to the lack of light. Now of course you can add supplemental light to bump up the daylight if the daylight hours are very short in your area.
- Speaker 1: [02:56](#) Right now you can have a light bulb in your, that is turned on a little bit in the morning and a little bit at night to kind of buffer the natural daylight hours. Some people put these on a timer. Um, some people do it manually. I know for me, I'm not going to remember to go turn on the light first thing in the morning and

turn it off and then turn it on again and turn it off again in the evening, not interested. So a timer would be my best bet for my lifestyle. But it's really up to you. Now of course, you don't have to add supplemental light to your chickens. And honestly, most of the time I do not. And I have a whole blog post that I will link in the show notes that talks kind of about the pros and the cons and the details of this.

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I kind of am okay with a little bit of a reduced egg production in the winter. You know, I believe that a lot of foods are designed to be seasonal. It's better for our bodies, for foods to be seasonal. It makes sense with the cycles of nature. So I'm okay that we have an egg glut in some months and an egg famine and others, although it still can be frustrating when you want to do some baking or have scrambled eggs and so on. So you get to decide what you want to do with your flock. There's lots of information out there if you decide to use supplemental light, or just be okay with less eggs this time of year. Now, number two, if you know, light is not necessarily your issue, you're doing the light thing and you're still not getting the eggs, then I would say age is the next factor to consider.

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Remember that chickens don't start laying till about 18 weeks old. And they can go for anywhere from like five to six years laying pretty consistently. But as they get older, they will begin to progressively lay less. So if you have a flock of hands that you've had for five years and you're just not seeing the production, it's probably related to age. So, obviously there's some options there. You can start a chicken retirement home and keep them forever. You can put them in the Stew pot, which some people are utterly horrified by, but that is the homesteader way, right? The old hens going into the Stewpot. Or sometimes people will even kind of create a program where they get the chicks, they raise them, they keep them for a couple of years and then they sell them to other homesteaders or other backyard chicken owners when they're still at the prime of their egg laying life.

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But you know, they're kinda on maybe the slightly downhill side of the slope. Maybe they're three years old and we know they're not going to get any younger, but they're not ready to be put out to pasture quite yet. And then some people have this program where they sell them at like three and then they buy the chicks. They just keep it rolling. So they always have younger hands that are at the peak of production. That is an option. Now, the one thing that's kind of cool is if you get chicks in the spring, I have noticed that they will often, they, they usually start laying late summer. They usually will lay all the way

through their first year. It might not be super high production, but like for example, right now we bought a lot of chicks last spring and we're still getting about five to six eggs a day from those pullets, those young hens. They don't seem to be as effected by the light. They just keep on trucking, which is nice. Although next year I know I'll have to figure out something else because they'll be two. And, then we'll have a different situation, but that's kind of a fun bonus when you get your chicks for the first year.

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Okay. Reason number three that can cause egg famines, is molting and molting as simply just the process. When a chicken loses feathers and grows new feathers and you'll know this is happening usually because your chickens start to look somewhat ratty and naked. Uh, they just, they look unhealthy and sometimes people will get worried, Oh my gosh, are they sick? Is something wrong? Do they have mange? And more often than not, it's just that their molting is totally natural. It happens once a year. It depends on the chicken and the breed. Sometimes to do a hard molt where all the feathers kind of come off. Or sometimes they'll do a soft molt where it's more of a gradual process. It usually lasts a few weeks, minimum can last longer, but they often do not lay eggs during this period because their body is putting so much energy into feather production.

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Right? So often with molt, you just kinda have to let it run its course. It's a natural thing, although you can speed up the process. Some people say by adding a little extra protein into your chicken's diet, since feathers are made of protein. So that's, that's one thing you can do, but for the most part just take note and enroll with it. Okay. Option number four, that causes reduced egg laying. I don't feel like this one is going to be super common for most of you, but when a hen gets broody they don't lay. In a broody hen, because of the way chickens have been bred over the decades, they're not super common. Certain breeds are more prone to broodiness. Usually the heirloom or heritage breeds that have not been tampered with as much like our Icelandic chickens, which are pretty much half wild.

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They go broody quite a bit. And when in a broody just a broody hen just refers to a hen that wants to sit on a nest of eggs and hatch them. And then in our more modern hybrid types of chickens, that trait has been selectively removed or bred out because in a commercial egg production, if you have all your hands trying to go broody all the time, it's really gonna hurt the bottom line, which is why you know your Rhode Island reds and

your barred rocks in your, uh, I'm blank on chicken names. All the chickens you're going to get at the feed store, you're probably going to be rare that you have a broody hen maybe once every other year. But I haven't had a lot of that, happen. I do have an entire guide on broody hens, like how to deal with them, how to break them up of being broody, how to promote them.

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Being broody, how I let them have their eggs. It's over on the blog and I'm going to put a link for that in the show notes if you want more info on it. But like I said, more often than not, you're not going to have to deal with this with your typical run of the mill modern chicken breeds. So it's something to keep in mind as an option as to why you're having fewer eggs, but probably not the number one reason. Okay. Option number five, if your chickens are sick, stressed out, maybe you moved them or you changed locations, like moved into a different barn or you'd bought them from someone else, so they're stressed out or if they have parasites, those can all be contributing factors. I know when we bought older chickens and brought them home, it's a week or so before they start laying.

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They just kind of have to get adjusted to things. I haven't had issues with parasites. I get people asking how we worm our chickens or if we worm our chickens and we don't. I've never noticed an issue with, with worms or anything like that. But if you have had that issue in your flock, it could be affecting your egg production. And then lastly, another thing that can be kind of related to this is if your chickens are not getting enough protein or calcium. So if you are trying to exclusively free range your flock, you know, you're just turning them loose in the barnyard and they're scavenging all day, that can affect egg production and you kind of have to weigh out if, uh, the money you're saving on not feeding them as much grain is worth the fewer eggs you're getting. Right? So it's kind of a trade off. We personally, like in the summer, encourage our birds to free range unless they're destroying the garden and then they're banished to their chicken run. But even when they're free ranging, we make sure they have lots of kitchen scraps and garden scraps and some additional grain, chicken feed, whatever to make sure they keep their nutrient needs met. So you might try adding a calcium supplement like oyster shell or ground up eggshells, or a higher protein feed and see if helps if you're having an issue.

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And then lastly, another thing that can make you feel like you're having an egg famine but may not be related to your chickens is if they're hiding the eggs. And don't discount this one cause it

had happened more than you think, especially if your chickens are running around your barn yard or your backyard. Every once in a while you'll have hens that just don't want to use the beautiful nesting boxes you have for them and they will hide those eggs. Our Icelandic hens are horrible about that. Like they literally hate the chicken coop. No matter how we set it up and they want to go lay their eggs in places that are completely inaccessible for us to get them and they go rotten and I get so angry because I'm feeding these chickens and they're wasting their eggs. But all of that aside, watch for hidden nests.

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And also sometimes chickens will eat their eggs, which is a really, it's a bummer because it's a hard habit to break. Honestly when we've had an egg eaters in the past, usually you know it cause you'll see broken eggs and shells lying on the floor. The way we've had to break that is just to make sure they have enough food. Sometimes if they're running out of food too early in the day, they'll, they're hungry. So they start pecking at things and they love the taste of eggs. Or just collecting the eggs more frequently. Often if we leave an egg, you know, the kids forget it, it's in there for a day, the longer it sits, the higher chance that somebody will get curious and go Peck at it and break it. And then of course they're gonna eat it because it's tastes good and it's high protein.

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So watch the egg eaters or watch for the hidiers. That could be part of your issue in the reduction of eggs that you have for your house. So just something else to keep in mind, but all in all, know that it takes a little bit of that deduction to figure out why your chickens may be laying less. And then like I said, though, it's kind of up to you to decide what you want to do with it, especially when it comes to the light. You know, there's times I'm okay with fewer eggs. It makes me just enjoy them all the more when we have a lot of them in the spring or the summer and we just kinda roll with the seasons. So you gotta figure out what's right for you and your homestead, but hopefully some of those tips gave you a good place to start.

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So if you're ready to do this homesteading thing and get the chickens and the garden going, but you're not quite sure where to start, I have created something that you will love, I think. And it is a special library of resources I've put together for homesteaders just like you. It also includes a comprehensive chicken coop guide. So if you're one of my chicken friends, you're to love that guide. You can get access to the whole thing for absolutely free over at theprairiehomestead.com/grow and that's it for this episode. If you enjoyed it, it would mean so much to me. If you could pop over to your favorite podcast

player and leave a quick review so more people can find this podcast. And that is all I have for today. Thanks for listening. But we'll chat more in the next episode. Happy homesteading, my friend.