

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. You guys, we just bought more chicks after I very clearly told myself we would not be buying any more this year. We bought a ton last year because they kept going on sale and I cannot be responsible for my actions when that happens. But anyway, I'm blaming this round because I obviously am taking zero personal responsibility when it comes to chickens, but I'm blaming this round on the Corona virus because food security, shortages, you know, the whole thing. So anyway, with this latest batch of laying hen chicks, there are 22 in all. It just kinda reminded me of some of the things that we have learned over the years as a family as far as what works and doesn't work when you have that new batch of chicks chirping in your brooder. This is some of this stuff you won't see in the chicken books. They're just the things you kind of learn over time. So I thought it would be helpful to share some of our insights with you today.

Speaker 1 ([01:09](#)):

I'm your host Jill Winger, and this is the podcast for the trailblazers, the Mavericks, the makers, the homesteaders, the modern pioneers, and the backyard farmers. If you've ever found yourself disenchanted with conformity and you just kinda like to swim upstream while the rest of society rides the river of least resistance, well you have found your tribe. So I think we've established that self control is no longer a virtue, right? If we're boosting our food security, or at least that is what I am telling myself. And I've noticed that judging by some of the conversations I've seen online lately, a whole bunch of you are diving into the world of chickens or maybe you already are there and you're just increasing your flock size. And I kind of love it because the more people growing food, the better. And eggs were one of the first things that disappeared from the stores when we had everyone kind of panic buying.

Speaker 1 ([02:10](#)):

So I love the idea of people across the country having their backyard flocks and not having to be dependent on the grocery store. So, like I said in the intro, we've had chicks for a decade now. We get usually a batch every single year. And we just learned some of the things that really work well and some of the things that really, really don't. So here are some of my best chick tips for you today. The first one is I learned this one the hard way. Um, when you're at the feed store and you're doing your impulse buy, you go in there for a pair of jeans cause like I hope you buy your jeans at the feed store like I do, I don't know where else people buy jeans but you go in there for a pair of jeans and you walk by the little chirpy and you have to get some um, because it's like candy at the checkout line and so you go to pick out your chicks and I would suggest if possible to get the biggest ones that are there, just because we've had really poor luck with the ones that just come off the truck.

Speaker 1 ([03:19](#)):

Like they're just brand new, like super, super tiny. They don't do as well. Once we get them home, they just tend to kind of keel over the next day for no good reason. And I think it's just those really young ones are far more fragile and just that added movement from the feed store to our house. It's just hard on them. So we've had the very best luck if we can get the slightly older chicks at the feed store, like I'm talking even like five or six days older. That has produced the least amount of like death loss with that batch of chicks. So sometimes you don't have a choice and sometimes you'll just be okay regardless. But if you have a choice to get the big ones, now not all of us have feed stores, so if you are shipping your chicks, if you're ordering them from an online hatchery, we've done this a couple of times.

Speaker 1 ([04:13](#)):

There's Murry McMurry, which was a big one. And then Meyer hatchery, those are kind of the big players in the chicken game. Shipping totally works. And how they do that is they will hatch the chicks and they're a day old. So they put them in the box and chicks don't need that food right away because they still have the nutrition from when they were coming out of their egg. So they'll ship them to you and then you get them. And oftentimes that works really, really well. The times for us when it didn't go well is when we had issues with our post office. So I suggest that if you are doing chick shipping, you know, your post office routines really well and you have a plan. We have, we're kind of in between two towns, the bigger town to the South of us, they, they, the post office there does not answer their phone.

Speaker 1 ([05:05](#)):

Like they might as well not have a phone number. So it was hugely stressful to try to communicate with them that chicks were coming in. And I kind of realized that a little bit too late in the game. It did work out. Christian had to drive to town at 1:00 AM, which was unfortunate, but it worked out. So that place or when we go to that bigger town, I do not ship chicks there anymore. What I will do instead in the future is have them shipped to our small town post office where I know the postmaster and I can have a little more say in how that all goes down, but just know your post office ahead of time. Another lesson we learned that was really hard. This was a devastating lesson. If you're getting meat bird chicks and laying hen chicks, do not put them in the same brooder even when they're brand new babies.

Speaker 1 ([05:57](#)):

We did this a couple years ago and they were so small, I thought, what difference does it make? Well it made a big difference because those meat bird chicks are so aggressive with the food. They trampled five or six of our laying chicks and they killed them. They just mowed right over the top of them. So we learned that lesson the very hard way. It just doesn't work. So if you have both varieties, put them in separate brooders another thing that kinda, I think there's a point of stress for some new chick owners, is the heat lamp, right? Cause heat lamps can be dangerous. You have to be really, really careful with them. If they, they fall into the bedding, they will catch on fire very quickly and chicken coops burning down due to faulty wiring or heat lamps that have come out of place, is not uncommon.

Speaker 1 ([06:51](#)):

So you have to be very, very careful with them. One option that I much prefer and if you can afford it, I think this is a great investment. There's these little heat plates and the one that we have is by a company called, I think it's Brinsea. And they have incubators and they have these heat plates and you can get big ones and you can get little ones. We just have a little one, I think it was around \$80. We've used it year after year, but it's very low temp and it just kinda mimics the heat of a hen. And so it has legs in this little flat surface and you can adjust how high it is, but you plug that in, you stick it in the brooder and the chicks go underneath it and it won't catch things on fire, which is kind of reassuring, don't you think?

Speaker 1 ([07:39](#)):

So what we have done is when we get those brand new chicks that are maybe just a day or two old, we'll use that heat plate and then as they get bigger we switch over to an actual heat lamp that is very, very secured to the wall so it doesn't fall off and get into the bedding. But I think that the heat lamp is, or the, excuse me, the heat plate is a really good option for those really fragile new babies. Now speaking of heat, you'll learn this as time goes on. And even my kids, my seven year old is learning how to tell, really watch what your chicks are doing. If they are cold, they will smush all together under that

heat lamp. And that's not necessarily a bad thing because that's how they keep warm. But you have to be careful if they're really cold and they really start smushing together and you have a number of chicks, the ones in the middle can get smushed and trampled.

Speaker 1 ([08:37](#)):

So I'm really mindful, I don't mind a little bit of bunching together, but if it's intense that I want to make sure I add another heat lamp or I lower the heat lamp or do something to warm up the brooder a little bit faster to prevent somebody from getting smooshed and dying, which has happened to us. So we're really mindful of that. And also you can also tell if they're hot because if they're hot, they're going to be plastered up against the wall, the furthest away from the heat lamp possible. And then honestly, sometimes by that time, it's later into the spring, the chicks might have their feathers and I can kind of go, well, maybe the heat lamp isn't important as much at this time. So just watch them, watch where they're standing. Watch how they're grouped up. It's really, really important and can save you some disasters in the long run.

Speaker 1 ([09:28](#)):

Now along with the watching, you're also going to start to learn which chicks aren't just not feeling great. And if you're brand new to chicks, this is going to take a little bit of practice. But I bet you pick up on it faster than you think. So when you get those babies, you put them in the brooder, you know, you want to be checking them pretty regularly the first few days especially. But watch for the chicks who are just kind of off on their own. Sometimes they kind of squat down a little bit. Sometimes their feathers kind of hang off to the side. They just don't look quite as perky. Their eyes look a little dull. That's the sign of a chick that is going downhill. And honestly, I don't always know why they go downhill. Sometimes it's completely inexplicable why one just doesn't look great.

Speaker 1 ([10:13](#)):

It's not like we have a disease passing through the flock or it's contagious. It's nothing like that. Sometimes they just don't thrive. So when we see that begin to happen, we kind of have our little routine, we'll put them in a cardboard box with some shavings and we transfer them up to the house, with a little heat plate. And I like to give them some electrolyte solution. Now you can buy this at the feed store, but I actually have a recipe for it on the blog. And it's basically a room temperature water with a pinch of salt and a pinch of sugar and you just give it to them in a little dropper, but not all the time, but a good amount of the time I would say we have been able to revive, or kinda perk up those chicks who start to go downhill with that electrolyte solution.

Speaker 1 ([11:05](#)):

And I usually give that job to the kids. They wrap the chick in a warm washcloth, not a wet washcloth, just like one that's been in the dryer that's warm. And they called the chick to their body to keep that body heat, to help that keep the baby warm and they'll give it little drops of the electrolyte solution. And it really can help and sometimes it doesn't help and they don't make it, but it's worth a try. And I'd rather at least do something proactive to try to save the chick rather than just kind of waiting and watching and crossing our fingers. So I will leave my electrolyte recipe for you in the show notes just in case. Okay. The other thing we watched for really, really closely, would be pasty butt, which is very elegant sounding obviously, but it's just when they start to poop and it gets stuck to their rear end and that it won't come off and it can actually kind of plug them up, it gets stuck in there, their little feathery down stuff and it can be pretty serious if you let it progress.

Speaker 1 ([12:05](#)):

And cause it can kill them eventually if it gets really bad. So we try to stay on top of that because it's much easier to deal with at the beginning. Then when it gets too far down the road. So the kids who do my chicken chores, they watch very carefully. If they see a chick who looks like they've got some junk on their butt they bring it up to the house, we will gently, gently try to knock that off or wipe it off with a wet, a warm wet rag or a paper towel and then just keep an eye on them. We haven't lost a lot to that, but we've also been pretty proactive and that's just something you can do to stay on top of things. And lastly, as I was kinda compiling list this list, I think the other, the other big thing that we have had happen, and this is what the older chicks, but let's say you have your brooder set up in a portion of your chicken coop and maybe you have a kind of a, a partition or a little short wall that keeps them separate as those chicks get older and this happens faster than you think.

Speaker 1 ([13:09](#)):

Make sure they can't jump out of the brooder or out of the partition and then get on the wrong side of it and get cold. Cause we've had that happen once or twice. And it was super sad because they just jumped out. They couldn't get back in and they got chilled overnight and they didn't make it. So right now we have, and maybe you've seen this on my Instagram or Facebook page, we just used a corner of our chicken coop and we use just some scrap a plywood and built a little box in the corner and it's pretty tall. Like I don't know how tall it is. It's, it's considerably tall. So they have to be a lot older, mature chick to be able to hop out of there. And by the time they get to that age we've usually moved them over into a different portion of our coop.

Speaker 1 ([13:55](#)):

But just be mindful if you're using something like a cardboard box or a Tupperware container, you just want to be watching to see how mobile they get cause it can happen more quickly than you expect. And that really is the bulk of my chick tips for anyone who's new to the whole chicken game. The good news is, is I think chicks are really easy and as long as you just keep an eye on them, make sure they have the fresh food and water, like you're gonna have a pretty good chance of success. And it's really rewarding. It's so fun. I still not tired of going down to the chicken coop and getting eggs, like still think it's awesome. So I highly recommend it. And if you need a little bit of guidance on how to set up your chicken coop or kind of how to get this whole thing rolling, I actually have a chicken coop checklist guide that I have put together and you can get it for free over at theprairiehomestead.com/grow and there's a bunch of other good resources in there too, but you'll find that chicken, excuse me, chicken coop checklist and a bunch of other stuff.

Speaker 1 ([15:05](#)):

And that's it for today, my friend. Don't forget to hit subscribe so all the new episodes show up automatically in your podcast player. It's just a little bit easier for you and I would love it if you could leave a quick review or rating while you're over there. If you found this episode helpful. It does helps more people find this podcast and bring home setting into their lives. Thanks so much for listening. We'll catch up next time on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast.