

10 Signs You Have a Broody Hen



This is broody hen season. What is a broody and how do you know you have one? The spring weather brings on the urge to set on eggs and hatch out a clutch of chicks. If the eggs have been fertilized by a rooster, in approximately 21 days from when the hen finishes collecting her eggs and begins to set on the eggs, you will have cute new chicks!

I specifically bought bantam Cochin chicks, because they are often serious broody hens. We ended up with six hens and 5 roosters, although only one rooster lives with the six hens. First only one hen began broody hen behavior. Before long, all the hens were setting on eggs. Some were co-nesting. Others were sitting on top of other broody hens. It was getting a little crazy in the hen house!

Signs that you have a Broody Hen

Some of the following symptoms and signs may occur when you have a broody hen.

- 1. Reluctance to get up off the egg or eggs in the nest**
- 2. Sitting in the nest even when there are no eggs**
- 3. Pecking your hand or biting you when you check for eggs underneath her.**
- 4. Chest and belly feathers are missing.**
- 5. Comb and wattles are pale**
- 6. The broody only leaves the nest once or twice a day, and quickly returns after a quick bite and drink**
- 7. Broody poop. It is unusually large and extremely smelly!**
- 8. Hen is very flattened out on the nest. I am impressed with how flat a hen can get while covering eggs. When picked up, she may refuse to put her feet down.**
- 9. Very little food and water are**

consumed by the brooding hen.

- 10. Broody hen clucks softly to her chicks as they get close to hatch day.**

It's fun to watch the broody hen and her intense concentration, as she waits for the big day. Things can get crazy though when you have a few hens trying to hatch eggs and each thinks she should have all the eggs. I noticed that our broody's eggs were being taken by some or all of the other hens. They were semi broody, but no where as serious as the first.



Moving a Hen to the Nursery or a Private Area

In order to hopefully have a successful hatch, I could see that our first broody of the year would have to be moved away from the other hens. Eggs were being broken, the nests were becoming sticky and dirty, and this was not a good situation for hatching chicks. Many people use a dog crate for a hen to live in while she broods. This is a great idea. There is often enough room in the dog crate for a small water and food of her own. Or you can use a smaller crate and let her out twice a day to get food and water and relieve herself. The crate keeps the eggs safe from other hens and the rooster. It also gives the chicks time to hatch without being attacked by other chickens.



If your hen is upset because you moved her away from the flock

or put her into a crate for nesting, try making the move when she is asleep. Carefully removing the eggs to the new nest area in the crate, then getting the broody hen and placing her on the eggs. Doing this while it's dark, may be successful.

After I moved the first broody hen to her own apartment, the other hens settled down to brooding eggs too. They didn't leave each other alone though. Most days four of the hens would be setting on a communal nest of eggs. At this point, I am letting them co - brood. If egg stealing and breakage starts to occur again, then another crate will be set up.



Nutrition for the Broody Hen

During the brooding time period, your hen won't eat as much food as usual. This fact makes it even more important that she eat a quality chicken food. Supplement with tasty treats to

encourage her to take some food. A soft scrambled egg, [meal worms](#), chickweed from the garden, are all interesting tasty treats. You want to do what you can to keep the hen in good condition.

What About When A Broody is a Bad Mother Hen?

I wasn't quite prepared for what was happening in another coop this spring. The hens were broody and not a breed known for broody behavior. But three hens were serious and kept setting.

They would set on one egg, three eggs, no eggs, and kept jumping from one nest to another. They proved challenging and would not nest in a lower location. All three insisted on brooding in the highest nest boxes. I wasn't sure how that would work out once the chicks hatched.

It turned out that not only were these hens making questionable choices in nesting locations, they also chose to leave the newly hatched chicks behind, leave the nest and go set on a different nest box of eggs. Luckily we check our coops a few times a day and the chicks were found and taken to a brooder. I didn't expect this behavior from a broody hen!



Broodiness Interrupts Egg Production and Collection

Even hens that do not have a rooster in the flock can go broody. The only problem is, if the eggs aren't fertilized, they won't develop. If you want to hatch chicks under a broody and you don't have a rooster, you can order hatching eggs from someone who does.

Broody hens don't lay eggs, and they may discourage other hens from using the nests, or even coming into the coop. Some

broody hens are quite mean when they set on eggs. The disruption can leave you with less eggs than you normally collect every day. Also, the broody moms would collect all the new eggs every day leaving us with no eggs!

Here's how I worked around this problem. One day I decided to mark all the eggs that were being set at that point. Each had a mark put on them using a sharpie marker. Any other eggs that did not have the mark, were new and could be collected. We aren't collecting as many eggs as before brooding began, but at least we can pick up the new eggs each day.



For some, not getting as many eggs is an issue. It's ok if you choose to [not have your hen brood](#). In the past, I have chosen to break my broody hens of the urge, instead of letting them set on eggs. We needed eggs more than we needed new chicks at that time.

Enjoy!



Brooding chicks from your own flock is an interesting and exciting adventure. Watching the hen teach the new babies how to find food and drink, and then cuddle under her wings to warm up, is very sweet reward for taking good care of the broody momma. Many would argue that this is the best part of chicken farming!

