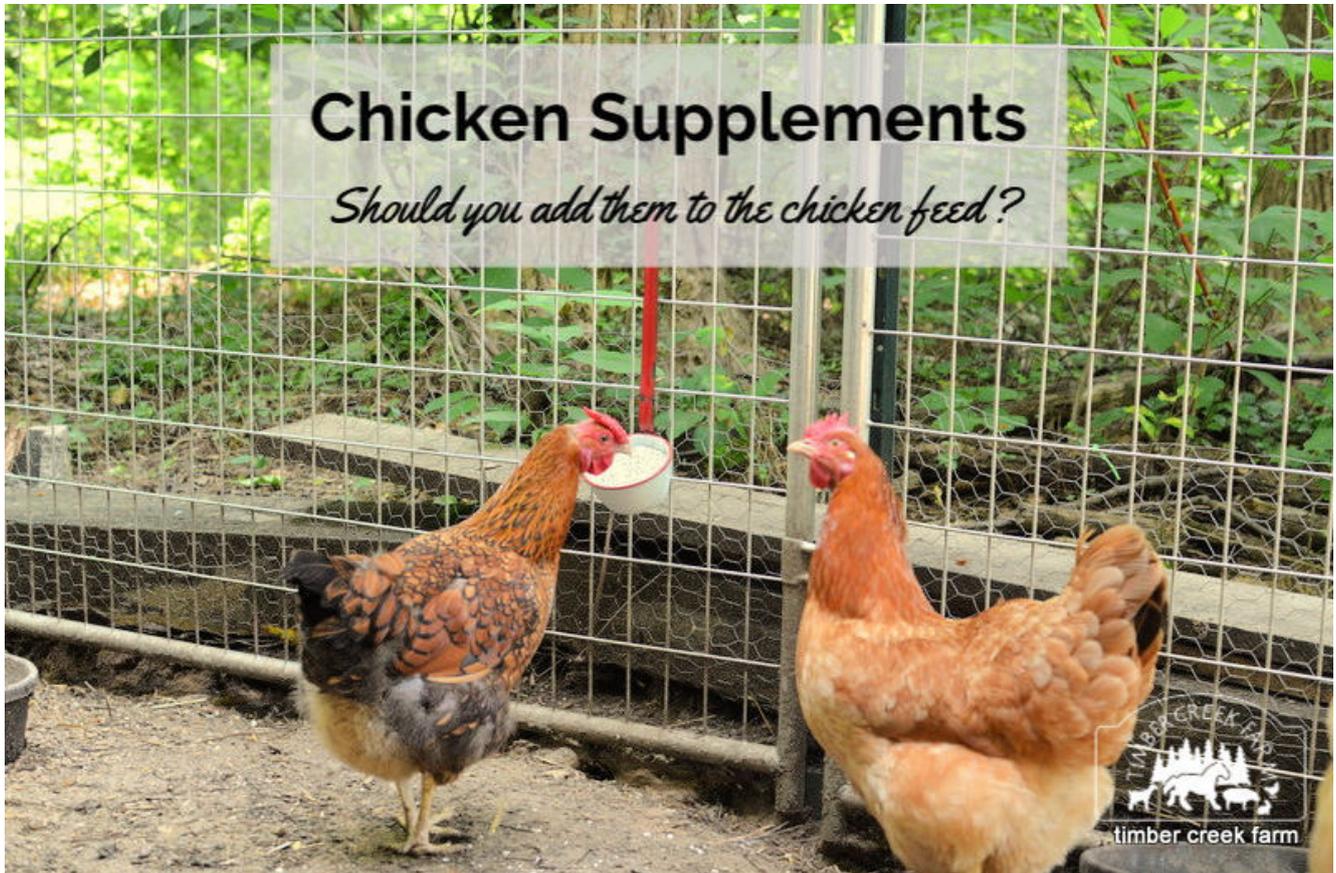


Are Chicken Supplements Needed?



When you are buying supplies for your first chicken flock, the stores will also offer chicken supplements. If the [daily chicken food](#) is a complete feed, do you still need to add chicken supplements? What else is essential to raising a healthy flock of layer hens?

Good quality [chicken feeds](#) are available in most areas of our country. It's even possible to mail order organic chicken feed, soy free and other specialty feeds. If we are going to all that expense and effort already, why are supplements still necessary? Offering free choice supplements of calcium and grit allows the birds to regulate and balance their [nutritional requirements](#).

Calcium and Grit as Chicken Supplements

During and after the fall molt, hens might not help themselves to as much supplemental calcium as they do during the spring and summer seasons. When calcium is offered free choice it allows them to take in what they need. Do I still offer calcium during late fall and winter? Yes, I do.

Calcium

I have some hens that don't take a long egg break after molt. Also, younger hens in their first year of lay will need the extra calcium to keep up with their bodies demands. Young pullets that have not begun to lay and roosters do not need extra calcium. Offering calcium free choice, avoids feeding too much to the birds who don't need it.

Bags of crushed oyster shell are sold in chicken supply areas of the feed store. As an alternative, save egg shells from your farm fresh eggs, rinse them, dry completely and crush into small pieces. Feeding egg shells back to the flock will not encourage egg eating.

Calcium is essential for the formation of strong egg shells. Stress, illness, age, and even breed can play a part in a weak egg shell forming. Having [free choice calcium](#) chicken supplement available helps your chickens avoid nutritional stress from a calcium deficiency in the feed.



Grit

Grit is another chicken supplement that we might not realize is needed. If your flock is able to be free ranging at least part of the day, they probably ingest small bits of rocky material that will help the gizzard grind up food. Grassy runs, and sandy soil might not offer enough bits of gravel. During the winter and if chickens are kept in a coop most of the time, access to dirt and gravel bits is limited. [Sour crop](#) and impacted crop can result.

Grit is available in two varieties. Chick grit is ground smaller and finer. Regular chicken grit has bigger pieces. Even if you feel your dirt has plenty of available grit, it is a safe practice to offer free choice grit to the flock.



Other Chicken Supplements and Treats

We may call these food items chicken supplements, but I can guarantee your flock will see them as treats. Black oil sunflower seeds, [grubs and meal worms](#), and table scraps are all good in moderation. Flax seeds, raisins, rice, and oats will bring the birds to your feet, begging for more. Remember that all treats should be given in moderation, even if they have a nutritional benefit. [Herbs](#) and foraged greens are an easy, tasty and healthy way to increase immunity and health in the flock.

I use some creative means of keeping the calcium and grit available free choice. Some of my favorite serving items are recycled ladles, match holders, and other small holders that

can be attached to the coop wall or doorway. I rarely see a hen enter the coop without stopping to peck at the calcium and grit servers.



We also hollowed out a space in the center of a log section. The center hole is a good serving dish for calcium or grit. Of course you would want to protect it from wet weather. Get creative with your chicken supplement servers.



Free choice for added calcium and grit, and moderation with other chicken supplements and treats is the best way to keep the nutrition balanced. How do you offer enough calcium and grit to your flock?

More discussion on chicken supplements and serving ideas can be found in my book [50 Do it Yourself Projects for Keeping Chickens](#), (Skyhorse Publishing, 2018) available on [this website](#) and [online](#) and local booksellers

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