

# BROODINESS IN CHICKENS

Broodiness is the term used to describe a chickens natural desire to hatch chicks. A broody hen sits tightly on the nest, she will usually fluff up her feathers and make a distinctive warning noise if you put your hand near her - often followed by a peck! Hens will go broody even if there are no eggs present and can often sit tight on the nest for up to 6 weeks if left to their own devices.

If you are not planning to hatch chicks then it is a very good idea to stop your hen being broody - for the following reasons:

1. She will sit for at least 3 weeks, some hens will still be sitting after 6 weeks.
2. During this time she will only leave the nest once a day to eat and drink, which is detrimental to her health - irregular food, no exercise = weak, vulnerable hen.
3. She will be in the way of the other hens when they want to lay and may steal their eggs to add to her own clutch, meaning you don't know which eggs are fresh. She won't be laying eggs herself and won't start laying for a while after broodiness has passed and her health recovers.
4. She will be very vulnerable to parasites and is a sitting target for red mite which can kill.
5. The other hens can get very frustrated with broody hens and the pecking order will be disrupted.

**If you're not hatching chicks she will have the disappointment of not having chicks at some point - whether it's after 6 weeks when she is weak and exhausted, or after a few days in a broody crate - the end result will be the same for her.**

It may seem unkind to stop her sitting, but it really is being cruel to be kind in the long run. If you are tempted to give her some fertile eggs consider first that you will still need to put her and her eggs (then chicks) in a separate house from the rest of the flock, and what you will do with the male chicks which will make up 50% or more of your hatch - they can be nearly impossible to re-home.

## Stopping a broody.

Your chicken wants to sit somewhere she feels safe to have chicks, and you have to make her hormone levels drop by placing her in the opposite position where she would not feel safe to raise chicks. Her hormone levels will drop and normal behaviour should resume.

A good option is to have a dog crate on stand-by. Dog crates are so useful for chicken keepers- they can be used for transport, sick bays and then broody crates and can be folded flat when not in use.

Leave her in the crate 24 hours a day until the broody behaviour stops - it may take anything from 48 hours to over a week. Put a broody hen in the crate as quickly as you can when you spot her sitting, she will stop sitting much faster if her hormone levels have not built up.

It is obviously essential the crate is placed in a safe place away from predators and she is out of draughts, direct sun and rain. Ensure she has access to food and water at all times. A shed with windows or light, airy garage or outbuilding is ideal.

# WHERE A BROODY CHICKEN WANTS TO BE



Dark, cosy corner that she feels is a safe place to sit and raise chicks.



# WHERE A BROODY NEEDS TO BE TO STOP HER SITTING



Position in a light, airy but predator & weather safe area

Constant access to food and water



Uncomfortable, airy base where she can't make a nest.



Place newspaper on the ground below the wire base to catch the droppings