

# Introducing New Hens



Introducing chickens can be a stressful experience. Sometimes it goes very smoothly but its better to be prepared if things take longer.

WHAT TO TRY	WHY
<p>Always introduce a minimum of 2 hens. The only exception to this is if you have a single hen left on her own then another single hen can be carefully introduced.</p>	<p>Safety in numbers. An established flock will attack a single hen &amp; make her life a misery, whereas 2 hens will stick together and have each other for company.</p>
<p>Ideally have the new hens directly alongside the existing flock in a separate house and run for a couple of weeks.</p> <p>New birds should ideally be isolated for a few weeks to ensure they are healthy and strong and give them time to build immunity to the new pathogens they will be exposed to.</p>	<p>The hens can get used to each other without physical fights occurring and they will have a chance to settle in without becoming stressed. Stress is the biggest cause of health problems in chickens - immunity is lowered when they are stressed &amp; any diseases lying dormant can surface. New birds to the flock will be exposed to many new pathogens and will need to build up immunity slowly without any added challenges.</p>
<p>Try to introduce similar age/size birds. It's not often feasible but for example avoid putting 2 x young bantams in with 10 large old hybrids. Try to balance the mix.</p>	<p>Putting young, immature birds in with bossy old hens is not ideal. The older birds will sense vulnerability and are likely to bully them and prevent them eating and drinking.</p>
<p>If you don't have 2 houses and runs do not put the newcomers in with the old hens until it's dark.</p> <p>The next morning let the old hens out and divide up an area in the run for the new hens to stay in during the day or put them in a large dog crate with food and water. If they are able to free range let the older hens out into the garden &amp; keep the new hens in the run.</p>	<p>If you put them in the day they will be immediately attacked by the existing hens who will see them as a threat to their territory and doesn't make a good start!</p> <p>When Separate, the new hens will be able to eat &amp; drink without being intimidated by the older hens.</p> <p>They need to be kept in a run for up to a week to imprint where the chicken house is and will then return each night.</p>
<p>When first letting the hens mix together ideally do this on neutral territory. Try an hour or so before bedtime so there isn't too much time for fighting before they return to bed.</p>	<p>If you introduce them in a small run they can't escape from each other. If they are in a large run or ideally out free ranging so they can all have their own space and can get away if they are attacked.</p>
<p>When you first mix them add lots of distractions. Hang up treats, cabbages, bird feeders stuffed with treats, throw feed into the bedding for them to look for etc.</p>	<p>Any distraction will take the focus off the new hens.</p>
<p><b>ESSENTIAL</b> - Put numerous temporary feed and water dishes around the house and run, ensure they are out of sight of each other. Check the crop of the new birds when they go to roost each night to check they are full.</p>	<p>The biggest issue is not physical fighting but subtle intimidation. The new hens will not eat and drink in sight of the existing hens. It is not uncommon for them to be starved out without it being obvious. It is very subtle and a glance from a dominant hen will scare a timid hen away.</p>