

Broody Hens



Broodiness is the term used to describe a chickens natural desire to hatch chicks. Some hens are more prone to going broody than others. If you have a persistent broody keep a cage set up ready, and at the first signs of her sitting put her in the crate to prevent her hormones building to a high level.

Signs of broodiness

She will sit tightly on the nest and rarely get off.

She will fluff up her feathers, make a distinctive warning noise and peck aggressively.

She will pluck out her chest feathers to enable her to get the eggs closer to her skin.

Scan the QR code on the right to see a video of a broody hen.



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

1. She will sit for at least 3 weeks, some hens will sit 6 weeks or more!
2. During this time she will only get off the nest once a day to eat & drink. This is detrimental to her health: no exercise + irregular food = weak & vulnerable hen.
3. She will annoy the other hens and the pecking order will get disrupted. She may steal their eggs & you won't know which are fresh. She won't lay eggs and won't lay again for a long time after, as she will have to recover from being broody.
4. She will be vulnerable to parasites and is a sitting target for red mite which can quickly kill.

It may seem unkind to stop her but it is definitely being cruel to be kind. If you are tempted to give her eggs to hatch consider half the hatch will be male (impossible to re-home), and she and her chicks will need putting in a separate house and run.

Stopping a Broody

Your chicken wants to sit somewhere she feels safe to hatch and rear chicks. You have to make her hormone levels drop by placing her somewhere she feels in danger and that it's not safe to raise chicks. After a few days her hormone levels will slowly drop. If you take her in and out of the crate her hormone levels will go up and down and never fully drop, so it is essential she stays in 24/7.

A good option is a dog crate or something similar. Dog crates are so useful for chicken keepers as they can be used for sick bays, introducing new hens to each other etc. and can be folded flat when not needed.

Place the crate in a light, airy position with no bedding. Provide food and water at all times. It is obviously essential she is protected from draughts, weather and all predators. A garden shed or light garage or outbuilding is ideal to place the crate in. The images below show perfect set ups.

Leave her in the crate 24/7 until the behaviour stops. This can be anything from a few days to a couple of weeks. Try taking her out every couple of days and watch to see her behaviour, when it returns to normal let her back out.

