

Weekly ANR Column

OSU Extension Clinton County

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### Preparing your flock for winter

Temperatures in southern Ohio will begin to plummet soon, and chicken owners should be preparing their flocks to overwinter. Chickens can easily produce eggs all winter long if they are given the right environment. Let's go over a basic winterizing list to help you prepare your coop before Old Man Winter arrives.

- Chickens' feet and combs can become frostbitten during sub-zero temperatures. Some chicken owners with small flocks like to cover the chickens' comb and wattles with petroleum jelly, this will reduce the likelihood of frostbite. For larger flocks, careful coop management is necessary.
- Bedding inside the coop needs to be fresh and deeply applied. Deeper floor bedding will insulate the coop. Chicken coops need to offer a well-ventilated environment, while also not allowing for direct airflow onto the birds. Humid chicken coops do not allow for manure to dry out and can cause respiratory issues for the chickens by producing ammonia or hydrogen sulfide gases. Partially open a south-facing window and install roof vents to allow moisture and stale air to naturally leave the coop.
- Provide enough roost space for each chicken. During the night, chickens can lay on their feet to keep them warm.
- Predators are especially desperate for food during the winter, make sure to check your coop regularly for any holes or attempted intrusions and fix immediately.
- Check your chicken's water more frequently, nothing slows egg production like not enough water. This is a good time to consider buying heated base waterers that plug into an extension cord.
- Think about adding more grains to their regular ration. Adding more energy to their diet will help maintain egg production and body heat insulation. You could mix extra cracked corn or a mixed chicken scratch into their layer mix. Avoid feeding suet cakes/blocks to your chickens meant for bird feeders. One can be given to a flock as a treat, but too much fat can lead to fatty liver disease issues in your flock.
- In colder climates, chickens are more susceptible to a condition called "pasting". This is where manure buildup occurs around the chickens' vent. Monitor your birds and remove blockages. Use warm water to assist in removal if needed.
- Collect eggs as early as possible after being laid. Eggs freeze quickly and will crack the shell reducing storage life.

For more information visit: [Caring for chickens in cold weather | UMN Extension](#)