



## Let's talk moulting

### How to help your birds through the moult

Chickens go through several moults in their lifetime; the first ones are shortly after they hatch, when they have 2, sometimes 3 moults as they work through to their adult plumage. Thereafter, they moult once a year, usually early Autumn. This is dependent on the amount of daylight available, so an early moult, or perhaps an interim small moult can be triggered by a sudden change in the daylight hours or temperature, even in the summer. A bird which has been hatching will often moult after the chicks have hatched.

A really heavy moult can knock their immune systems out of whack and leave them susceptible to viruses and bacterial infections.

As the daylight hours shorten drastically, a chicken's body clock changes, they eat less and they start to moult; some birds will do a gradual moult, replacing feathers progressively, working down the body from head to tail. Others will do a total feather-drop and be virtually naked, which can look alarming. The best layers can often be the heavier moulters.



A heavy moult takes up a lot of energy and nutrients, and can have an adverse effect on a bird's immune system, so it is essential to support them through this difficult period with extra care and high quality nutrition. You will notice that they look with drawn, paler in the face and will possibly have stopped laying eggs.

I usually take them off layers rations (my pure breeds are producing very few eggs by this time anyway) and feed them on growers pellets, which have more of the protein that they need to grow new feathers. I add some extra powdered Biotin to their feed (it contains the 'building block nutrients' for forming feathers) and add a measure of Nettex's Vit Boost to their water every day; this excellent product keeps them in top condition, and the B vits in it help to lower stress levels.



Talking of stress levels, remember that this is a period when your flock would appreciate a bit of peace and less handling; the emerging feathers in their quills have a strong blood supply and are very sensitive, so handling them will cause some discomfort. I avoid any unnecessary handling at this time and hold off on routine medication such as worming until they are fully feathered again. Try not to move any birds to different pens around moulting time as this would also cause stress.

As your hens will all start to moult at different times (well mine do!) it can take about a month for them all to come out the other side, and a further 3 weeks or so to start to lay eggs again.