

# Cheshire Chickens with Food4Macc

## Keeping Warrens and Other Hybrid Egg Layers



### About Warrens, Shavers, Novo Brown. [Other Breeds](#)

Warrens, Shavers, Novo Brown start laying at about 20- 24 weeks old and will lay eggs for about 14-18 months. They usually have a rest, called a moult, during their second winter for about 2-3 months. They will lay an egg each day once they start occasionally they will miss a day. As they get older they will start to lay less. Commercially they can lay up to 330 eggs per year. In back gardens this varies but is usually over 300. They are generally very easy to keep and are much calmer and tamer than pure breeds.

### Is It Worth it?

Lifetime achievement: 300 eggs = 25 dozen eggs @ £3= £75

Costs: £6 per bird, plus 56weeks @ 1kg corn @ 35p/kg = £25.60

Roughly £50 profit through the life of the bird – less expenses :-

Equipment, Bedding, Louse powder, - and your time.

### The Coop and Run

The coop should be situated in a sheltered position. Warrens, Shavers, Novo Brown will tolerate a few days at freezing (keep the water thawed) but measures should be taken to protect them from prolonged or severe frost. Ideally they require at least half a square metre of floor space and no more than 7 birds to the square metre inside the coop.

Provide about 20cm of perching per bird 15-60 cm off the ground.

They are quite happy to share nest boxes and often all birds will lay in the same one. For larger flocks provide a nest box for every 4-8 birds.

### Drinkers



Provide a purpose made drinker and feeder. The feeder will need to be protected from rain either by placing it in the coop or under a sheltered area of the run. Ideally it should be off the ground to prevent it from getting full of dirt. Ideally drinkers should be hung 15 to 20 cm off the ground, this will keep them level, keep the dirt out and provide the best drinking height. If the drinker is placed in the run the birds will need to be given early morning access, you can leave the hatch to the run open in mild weather

providing the run is secure. The drinker is best inside the coop in winter, it will help prevent freezing.

### **The Run**

It is a good idea to have a secure run attached to your coop that they can't escape from and predators can't get in. You can leave the birds in the secure run when you are out and let them range free or in a fenced area when there is someone about. If your run is static it will quickly become heavily soiled with droppings. A layer of bark chippings will help keep the run healthier and give the birds something to scratch around in. Use a ground sanitizer on heavily soiled areas around the coop. This will reduce smells and eradicate bacteria and worm eggs.

**Tip:** Cover the top and prevailing wind side of small runs to keep the rain off. A dry run will remain healthier much longer than a wet one.

### **Bedding and Nest Material**

For most situations the best material for the bottom of the coop will be fine wood shavings. Fine wood shavings make an excellent natural litter that birds like to dust bathe in. Spread shavings over the floor of the coop 3 to 5 cm deep. As long as it stays dry and loose there is no need to change it regularly. If there is a build up of droppings under the perch then just replace that area. If the bedding becomes damp or starts clogging together then it is time to change it. Wood chip is more durable if the floor gets damp quickly and may be a better alternative for larger flocks. Straw is an economical alternative but may be difficult to clean out once saturated with droppings.

### **Nest Boxes**

Place barley straw in the nest boxes at the onset of lay; there is little point putting it in before lay as they will just root it out and dirty it. Many people shut off nest boxes until birds are about to lay to prevent birds roosting in them and making a mess.

### **Introducing New Birds.**

When you get your birds home put them in the coop and let them find their way into the secure run if you have one. After a week or two, when they have settled in, you can let them wander around freely if you like but only if there is someone about. Obviously don't let them on to the road and don't let anything chase them.

Be aware of foxes, I am asked to replace fox kills hundreds of times each year; it is by far the most common problem. Larger flocks will perform better and have fewer problems if they are kept separate from existing flocks.

Thoroughly clean out and disinfect existing coops before introducing new birds. If possible the new flock should be given access to rested ground that hasn't had birds on for at least six weeks. With smaller flocks it may not be practical to keep new birds separate. Introducing new birds has varied results. Sometimes it is uneventful and they all get along fine in no time. Sometimes the existing matriarch will not tolerate newcomers even after days. Generally a new pecking order will have to be established. This usually involves strutting about, neck stretching, chest bashing and mock fighting ending with the newcomers retreating to the far end of the run or coop. If the existing birds continue to hound the newcomers or it gets nasty then you will have to separate them. Introducing into the coop at dusk often helps letting them all wake up together in the morning. A temporary mesh divider in the run will allow them to get used to each other before they are mixed during the day.

**Roosting tip:** on the first night go in the coop at dusk and place any birds that aren't already there on the perches, after that they will usually go up themselves.

## Feeding Guide

Warrens, Shavers, Novo Brown need to be fed on layers pellets or layers mash which is high in protein (at least 15%). If the bag has "Layers" written on it should contain a complete balanced diet for laying chickens. It should contain all the protein, fibre, oil, vitamins, minerals (including oyster shell) and other essential nutrition that laying birds need. Feed them in the morning every day. They eat about 1kg per bird per week (more in cold weather). Try to judge how much they eat and feed them that amount every day. They like the interaction of being fed and like to see new food each day. When you feed them there should be just a little food left from the previous day, if the feeder is still half full you are giving them too much, if it is pecked clean you are not giving them enough. If you want to give them a treat later on in the afternoon or evening you can give them a little kitchen scraps or mixed corn. Scattering a handful of mixed corn on dry ground will encourage their natural foraging behaviour and relieve boredom. Don't overdo the treats, if you give them too much they will stop eating sufficient pellets and not get the required protein and other nutrition.

## Flint Grit

If birds are ranging free they will probably be picking up grass and other vegetation. It is a good idea to give them a little flint grit once every three or four weeks to help them digest fibrous material. Don't feed chickens grass cuttings they can clog in the crop and go sour preventing the bird from eating. If this happens it will appear as a large bulge at the base of the neck.

## Water

They should have access to fresh water at all time. Clean the water fountain out every 2-3 days to prevent the build up of algae.

## Health

Health wise there are rarely problems with new sites. Most disease problems occur on long established sites when the ground has become saturated with droppings or new birds are mixed with old. Our birds are fully vaccinated to commercial standards, worming after a couple of months is a good idea or I sell a gut conditioner that can be given monthly that will flush out worms, internal parasites and generally cleanse the gut.

## Red Mite

Red mite is a common problem in established sites. Examine birds regularly, look under the wings where there are few feathers, this is a warm place where Red Mite like to congregate. They are the size of a full stop and are usually red but can be black or opaque. If you see a small speck that moves it's probably a mite. Once spotted treat immediately. The mites live on the birds and they lay their eggs in the nooks and crevices of the coop. You will have to eradicate both to get rid of the problem. Remove the birds from the coop while it is thoroughly cleaned. Spray all the nooks and crevices with mite spray and thoroughly dust the birds with Mite powder and replace the bedding before returning them.

## Clipping



Clipping the flight feathers on one wing will usually prevent birds flying over 1.2M high but this will make it easier for predators to

catch them! Once settled in Warrens always return at dusk or feed time.

## Optimising Egg Production

This will be of most interest to people with larger flocks where the cost of production has to be covered and profit is required. Firstly follow the general advice on keeping Warrens particularly on feed.

### Feed



In larger flocks hybrids need encouraging to eat. Commercially, birds are fed small amount 3 or 4 times a day with an 'eat up' period in the middle of the day. Make sure that birds have enough trough space. They do most of their eating when they have just been fed so it is important that all birds can feed at the same time. Allow 10cm of trough space per bird for straight troughs (10cm per side providing they have access to both sides). Allow 7cm of trough space per bird for circular feeders (the regulation is 5cm but this is rarely enough). Most drinkers are circular, allow 1cm of trough per bird. Birds like to drink at lights on, so make sure there is water available at all times.

### Health

Keep flocks of different ages separate, this will reduce health risks, allow birds to settle in faster with reduced stress, achieve a quicker onset of lay and allow birds to be monitored more effectively.

Before restocking, thoroughly clean the coop and disinfect with an approved

disinfectant. If the coop is mobile move it to new ground, if not then sanitise the ground around the coop which should be rested for at least six weeks between flocks

Keep visitors away from your birds as much as possible and use a foot bath disinfectant when this is unavoidable.

Discourage wild birds and vermin by feeding inside the coop. Use deep troughed feeders with an inward facing top lip and 'anti flick' fins; this will reduce waste and attract fewer vermin.

Maintain dry loose bedding, fresh clean water and rotate their range area or move the coop to rested ground periodically.

**The initial signs of Health, Stress and Nutritional problems can often be seen in the egg production before there are any symptoms in the birds. If eggs are collected in the evening as well as in the morning it will be possible to accurately monitor egg numbers on a day to day basis (collecting just in the morning will produce erratic statistics). Look out for unusual amounts of small eggs, reduced numbers and pale or thin shelled eggs. If problems are identified early recovery is usually much quicker.**

### Lighting

Lighting the coop will be of great benefit particularly as winter approaches. Lighting need not be very bright (11 watt energy saving bulbs are adequate). It is strongly recommended that lighting is operated via a time clock. The extra light is of most benefit coming on early morning (3AM) and should make the total day length up to 15 or 16 hours. On commercial sites new birds are usually started at 10 hours but not less than they have had during rearing. The lighting is boosted by 2 hours at around 18 weeks but not until the most of the birds have reached 1.6Kg. The lighting can then be increased by half an hour every 1 - 2 weeks up to 15

hours total. An extra hour can be added as winter approaches.

## Temperature

Temperature control will help optimise feed conversion. The ideal temperature is 18C to 24C in the coop. Warrens can tolerate lower temperatures but will eat more food.

Temperatures above 24C will result in reduced feed intake and smaller eggs. Raising the temperature is achieved with insulation, controlled ventilation and stocking density. Lowering the temperature is achieved with increased ventilation (roof vents or fans).

## Vaccinations

Point of lay warrens are vaccinated/medicated against the following:

- Marrecks
- Salmonella
- EDS (Egg Drop Syndrome)
- IB (Infectious Bronchitis)
- Newcastle disease
- TRT/SHS (Turkey Rhino Tracheitis/Swollen Head Syndrome)
- ILT (Infectious Laryngotracheitis)
- IBD (Infectious Bursal Disease)/Gumboro
- Coccidiosis

It is not usually possible to vaccinate small numbers of birds. Vaccines come in 2000 dose phials and are administered throughout rear.

If you require more information please contact us.

## Layers pellets or mash?

Pellets are the most common choice for back gardens and small free range egg producers. Pellets are less wasteful and flow well through most feeders.

Mash may be more palatable to some birds and can be useful for weaning pullets used to mash on to pellets by mixing the two. Our NovoBrown pullets have been fed on coarse grained layers mash from 16 wks old to point of sale.

## Feeding Guide

Offer on an ad-lib basis from point of lay. Layers feeds do not require any additional limestone or oyster shell grit. The diet is fully balanced for optimum egg production, consistent shell quality, good yolk colour and excellent egg size.

Hybrids need encouraging to eat layers pellets or mash. The best way to do this is to feed them every morning giving them just one day's feed (about 130 grms per bird). When you feed them the following day there should be just a little feed left in the feeder. If it is still half full you are giving them too much. If it is pecked clean you are not giving them enough. Chickens like the interaction of being fed and like to see new feed appear. If a hopper is always full no new feed will appear and they will get bored with it. Feed intake may be reduced which will result in poor production. On commercial farms birds are fed small amounts several times a day to encourage them to eat enough layers feed.

If you are giving birds mixed corn or other treats give it to them in the afternoon or evening so as to allow time for them to eat the desired amount of layers feed.

There will be no harm done if birds are occasionally given several days feed in a hopper when going away for a few days. Someone should look in on birds daily to make sure there are no problems.

Hybrids such as the Warren require high levels of protein (at least 15% of their total intake). They also have a limited appetite so it is important that they mainly eat a quality layers feed. Ideally they should be encouraged to eat layers pellets or layers mash and nothing else. Mixed corn can be

fed as a supplement usually by scattering a few handfuls on an area of dry ground to encourage their natural behaviour. It is not advisable to feed hybrids vegetables, kitchen scraps or bread as they will tend to eat less layers pellets and not get the necessary protein intake. This can result in small egg size, reduced egg production and birds may stop laying completely. **DO NOT FEED CHICKENS GRASS CUTTINGS**, apart from having very little protein it can go sour in their crop and stop them from eating at all.

Store feed in a cool dry place.

Fresh, clean water should be available to the birds at all times.

Qty	Age (Weeks)						
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
0 - 4	£7.40						
5 - 11	£6.40						
12 - 19	£5.95		£6.0 5	£6.1 5	£6.2 5	£6.3 5	
20 - 39	£5.65		£5.7 5	£5.8 5	£5.9 5	£6.0 5	
40 - 99	£5.2 5	£5.35		£5.4 5	£5.5 5	£5.6 5	£5.7 5
100 +	£4.8 0	£4.9 0	£4.9 0	£5.3 0	£5.4 0	£5.5 0	£5.6 0

# **Sycamore Farm**

*the home of*

# **Cheshire Chickens**

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