

TIPS FOR CLEANING AND SANITIZING EGGS FOR SMALL FLOCKS

Small poultry flocks may produce a high percentage of dirty eggs. Many of these eggs are soiled because they are laid in dirty nests or are being laid on the floor. Dirty eggs can be a health hazard if they are not properly cleaned and sanitized.

The best control method is to prevent soiling of the eggs. We can't stop the production of floor eggs, but we can keep them to a minimum if we start training the flock early. When the pullets are 16 to 18 weeks of age, let them have access to nests during the day. Provide at least one nest for each four hens. In the evening remove all birds from the nests and close the opening so that the pullets cannot re-enter them for overnight roosting. Nests should be opened again in the early morning. These steps will get the pullets in the habit of using nests. Persistent floor layers can be trained by picking them up and putting them on the nest.

Gather eggs at least three times a day. The longer you leave eggs in the nest the better their chances are of being broken and fouling the nest. Gather them twice in the morning and once in mid-to-late afternoon. Nests should be cleaned once a week to remove dirty litter and manure. Replace the soiled nesting material with clean straw or shavings. Frequent gathering and clean nests are the keys to producing clean eggs.

Even under the best of conditions, some dirty eggs will still be produced. These eggs should be placed in a separate container at gathering time so they can't soil clean eggs. The dirty eggs can accumulate with each gathering, but must be cleaned at the end of the day. This helps to prevent hardening of the dirt and reduces the chance of microbial penetration of the shell.

Dirty eggs should be washed in water that is at least 20°F warmer than the eggs. A good water temperature is 120°F or as hot as the hands can tolerate. This causes the egg contents to expand and prevent entry of microbe contaminated water through the shell pores. Use a nonfoaming, unscented detergent. The fragrance in scented detergents will be absorbed by the eggs, giving them an off-flavor or odor when eaten. Unscented automatic dishwasher or laundry detergent can be used. *Rubber gloves should be worn as these materials can be irritating to the skin.* Home laundry bleach can be used as a sanitizing dip. Prepare the sanitizer according to the manufacturer's directions for a weak disinfectant.

Follow these directions for cleaning eggs. If you have only a few eggs (12 or less) wash them under the water tap and dip them in a sanitizer. The water and sanitizer should be as hot as the hands can tolerate. Larger numbers of eggs require greater attention. Make up basins of detergent, rinse water and sanitizer, each containing 1 to 2 gallons of solution. Change the detergent and rinse water after cleaning each 3 to 4 dozen eggs. The temperature of each solution should be no more than 120°F and no less than 110°F. Hands in rubber gloves can tolerate these temperatures. Wash each egg separately. Do not soak the eggs before or during cleaning. Each egg should be rinsed in clean water, dipped in the sanitizer and set aside to dry. Place clean eggs in the refrigerator after they are completely dry. Refrigerated eggs should be stored in sealable plastic containers such as large food bags or bowls. This will prevent absorption of flavors and odors from other foods in the refrigerator. It will also help retain the eggs' initial high quality.

Follow these steps to have clean eggs from the flock:

1. Provide one nest for each four hens.
2. Begin training the pullets to the nest before they start to lay.
3. Clean nests once a week.
4. Gather eggs twice in the morning and once in the afternoon.
5. Separate dirty and clean eggs at the time of gathering.
6. Wash dirty eggs in water that is 110° to 120°F.
7. Do not soak eggs before or during washing.
8. Change the wash water after each 3 to 4 dozen eggs cleaned.
9. Rinse each egg in clean water, dip in a sanitizer and air dry.
10. Keep eggs in a closed container in the refrigerator.