

## Baby Chicks

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Choosing a breed or variety - There are three general categories of baby chicks to consider egg-type, meat-type, or dual-purpose breeds. If there is a need to fill the freezer for the year, choose the Cornish-Rock cross chicks. These birds are usually only grown for 8-12 weeks and should be finished during the cooler parts of the spring before temperatures get too hot since meat chicks are prone to high temperatures. The egg-type breeds are generally the best layers and will probably remain light weight most of their life. This is good for the high summer temperatures we get in Kansas, and this keeps feed costs down. The roosters in this category are generally poor meat producers since they, too, carry the low weight genetics of the hens. Dual-purpose breeds were developed as workhorses, meant to lay eggs for a season, and then be processed into meat the first winter. The problem is that few of these lines have been evaluated and selected consistently to be efficient eggs layers or meat makers. However, most dual-purpose breeds make good yard birds.

Brown egg or white egg? Most breeds of chickens lay brown-shelled eggs. Few lay eggs with various tints. The white-shelled eggs are easiest to candle at home. Brown eggs tend to sell for more in the market so if you plan to sell extra eggs, then focus on brown shells. White-egg-layer types tend to lay a few more eggs with a bit less feed and will produce a little longer. The shell color or tint has little to do with taste or nutritional value, so it is more of a matter of preference.

Select vaccinated chicks if offered. Most hatcheries offer vaccination. This generally means Marek's Vaccine. This disease occurs in all states. Marek's Vaccine is one that is most successful if administered as soon as the chicks hatch, so having the hatchery do it for you is a good choice. There are numerous other vaccines and boosters for poultry, but most cannot be given at hatch.

Pullets, cockerels, or straight run? At hatch, an experienced handler can determine the sex of a chick. Pullets will be all female, so if you want eggs, then you should choose pullets. Straight run means that the chicks have not been examined so you get a mix of males and females. Remember that it is not always 50/50! If you place a small order of 10 chicks, you could easily get seven pullets and three cockerels, or you may even get seven rooster cockerels and just three pullets. If the goal is eggs, then mathematically it pays to buy the pullets in almost all cases. For meat, the Cornish-Rock cockerels tend to grow faster with slightly less feed, but the sex difference overall is usually not worth paying for sexed makes compared to simply buying straight run.

Many hatcheries will offer a choice of shipping dates. Remember that chicks will need a breeze-free area with a heat source of up to 90 degrees F. The longer you wait in spring, the less it will cost to heat the chicks during the growing phase. Just remember to place your order early for reservations. For meat birds, they are best grown in the spring or fall since they tend to not be heat tolerant. So time your shipment so that the birds are heaviest during the cooler part of the season.

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office.  
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