

Molt: Optimize Feather Regrowth with Proper Nutrition

All hens and roosters experience molt, the normal, natural process of losing and regrowing feathers. It occurs annually every fall as the days shorten, occurring any time between August and December. Chickens typically experience their first molt at about 18 months of age. The molt period can last anywhere from 4 to 16 weeks, depending on the bird.

Molt's purpose is to supply chickens with fresh, new feathers – the best defense against skin infections, and the cold and precipitation of winter. Though completely normal, it can be a stressful time for chickens and their owners. The quickest, healthiest way to help chickens through molt is proper nutrition.

How Molt Affects Chickens and Owners

Chicken owners experience molt in two ways. During molt, a chicken may look shockingly ragged, with bald spots and thin patches. For some, their familiar fluffy plumage may disappear almost entirely. Second, a hen's egg production either decreases or stops, while her body redirects its energy and protein to feather regrowth. The faster a flock gets through molt, the sooner owners can again enjoy the flock's distinctive feathers and tasty eggs.



For chickens, molt can be a vulnerable time, with higher susceptibility to infection and disease. Chicken skin is sensitive during molt, and skin integrity is important to prevent invading infections. Keeping birds strong, healthy and stress-free through the regrowth

process will get them back to peak performance sooner. A feed with prebiotics and probiotics can help maintain gut health and assure better nutrient absorption, helping to assure feed efficiency and promote better overall health of the flock.

Feather Loss and Regrowth Timeline

Just as each chicken has its own personality, each will go through molt differently. Some lose only a few feathers, and regrowth occurs as quickly as three to four weeks. Other chickens lose the majority of their feathers and take 12 to 16 weeks to grow them back.

However, all chickens will lose feathers in the same sequence, starting with the head and neck first, then along the back, breast and thighs, and finally, the tail. Regrowth occurs in this same sequence, starting with the head and neck, continuing through the body and ending with the tail.



The Importance of Protein

Protein is necessary for the growth and repair of tissues and bones. Feathers consist of approximately 85% protein, so regrowing feathers requires a higher protein feed (18%) than regular layer feed (16%), and the correct amino acid profile.

Feather growth is a cycle of nutrient distribution. When feathers are first growing, a young chicken's body directs nutrients to the feather follicles, keeping them moist, soft and dense. Once hens start laying (and roosters start maturing), nutrients are directed to egg production and other bodily functions.

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Eventually, the “starved” feathers become dry, brittle, and fall out.

The new feathers that emerge during molt are called pinfeathers. These nutrient-rich, vein-filled feather shafts supply blood to the newly growing feather, which explains the need for higher protein.

How to Feed During Molt

Poultry hobbyists unfamiliar with molt may panic when they see their flock losing feathers left and right. They don’t know what to do to help “their girls” recover, particularly, the role good nutrition plays.

The marketplace has been void of a product designed for feeding during molt. In turn, poultry owners have resorted to using homemade supplements to get more protein into their flock’s diet. The most common supplements are scrambled eggs, sunflower seeds, cat food, dog food, or supplementing the bird’s diet with a higher protein feed (i.e., chick starter or gamebird feed). The pitfalls are inconvenience, inconsistency, and possible nutritional deficiency, if not fed in the proper ratio for a well-balanced diet.



The Feed Solution:

New NatureWise[®] Feather Fixer[™]

This product is a complete feed with 18% protein and organic trace minerals for optimal feather growth. It also includes Mite-Fighter[™] Technology to help prevent mite infestation and the subsequent irritation of exposed skin.



Additional product features include:

- Organic trace minerals that are more bio-available to support bone strength, feather regrowth, egg shell quality and improved skin integrity.
- Higher energy levels to support feather growth and egg production.
- A natural source of greens for periods when there is limited grass, making the fall transition of free-ranging chickens into the coop easier.
- Prebiotics and probiotics to support digestive health and nutrient absorption, especially important during times of stress, like molt.
- Marigold extract for golden yolks and skin coloration (beaks and legs).

If desired, Feather Fixer[™] can be fed year round to hens and roosters to optimize plumage and feather quality. No additional supplements are needed, although free-choice oyster shell should always be available to laying hens.

With proper nutrition and care, molting chickens will more quickly return to their full-feathered, egg-laying selves.

For additional information on NatureWise[®] Feather Fixer[™] with Mite-Fighter[™] Technology, visit NutrenaPoultryFeed.com.