



## So you want to buy new hens.....

### Chicks or pullets? That's the question

You are looking to add to your flock, but do you choose chicks or point of lay pullets?

Pure breeds or Hybrids?

#### So, what are they called?

A baby chicken is called a **Chick** until it's about 8 weeks old, the females are called a **Pullet** until they are a year old; they come into lay around 20 weeks of age. After that first year, they are called a **Hen**.

Taking this one step at a time.... if you are looking for a hardy, robust type of hen, which has been vaccinated and will lay a lot of eggs, then choose a **hybrid**; they come in many colourways and crosses of breeds, but all are vaccinated and will lay plenty of eggs. Ideal starter hens, or for those who want a steady supply of eggs!



If the eggs are secondary and you don't mind getting less (or none) in the Winter, then why not go for **pure breeds**? They are a little more difficult to source, but the variety of sizes (bantams and large fowl), the varied colourways and feathering make them a very pretty addition to your garden. They are reared on a much smaller scale, so are not likely to be vaccinated.

#### Do you buy teeny chicks or point of lay pullets?

**Chicks** need a lot of care and, depending on their age, they will need to be kept under a heat lamp and shouldn't go outside until they are about 6 weeks old (this is dependent on your climate). I would only advise buying chicks if you are already an experienced poultry keeper. You won't get any eggs for about 5 months.



**Pullets** will come 'ready to go'; you can pop them straight outside and they will already be eating layers feed, you can expect them to start to lay around 20 weeks of age.

Whether you are buying hybrids or pure breed hens, be careful to do your 'due diligence' research... look at different suppliers and breeders near you, visit to see their facilities and check that their birds are kept in a clean and healthy environment. Be prepared to pick up, inspect and do a [health check](#) on each bird before you commit to buy it – don't be rushed into your decision, and walk away if you find that the facilities and birds are in less than top condition.

### **What happens when you get them home?**

If these are your first hens, then get your housing set up well before you go to buy your birds – get used to how it all works, and where's the best place to site it. Give the housing a thorough spray and powdering to deter any red mites or lice before adding the bedding. Set up a clear, waterproof covering on your run.

When you get your birds home, try to keep things quiet for them as they will be very nervous. Pop them straight into the housing and leave them shut in there for an hour or two to calm down and chill a bit. After this, you can let them into the run to explore and enjoy their food and water, but please keep them in the run – to build up a homing instinct – for **a couple of weeks**. I use this time to check and treat them for lice and worms, and to train them to come when I whistle (yes, really!) the latter is a real asset when you need to get them in the run at the end of the day. Please don't be worried if they stay in the housing for a couple of days, only darting out to feed; they are nervous and need to adjust before they get more confident.

Start to let them out to free range when you are at home and can keep an eye on proceedings. Remember that they must only be let out in the morning once it is properly light, and should go back in their secure run BEFORE it starts to get dark.

Enjoy your chickens.

See my other articles on housing and feed, and book onto one of my chicken keeping courses on my website [www.claretaylor.com](http://www.claretaylor.com)