

Raising Coturnix Quail Chicks

Like anything, there are a variety of opinions and ideas on raising quail but these are just a few things that have worked for me. They are great little birds and are really easy to care for once mature!

Brooder Temps

95 - Week 1

86 - Week 2

77 - Week 3

68 - Week 4

I adjust the height of a heat lamp and the wattage of the bulb to hit these temps, but the best way to tell if they're too hot or cold is to see how they're acting in the brooder. If they're huddled up directly under the lamp, they're too cold. If they're as far from the lamp as they can get, it's too hot. If they're spread out and moving freely around the brooder, they're just right.

Water

When the chicks are less than a week old, they may try to drown themselves in a dish of water. Little Giant Quail Watering cups work well and I use these for both chicks and adults. (See Products section at the bottom of this document. Tractor Supply Company often has these in stock as well. Standard size mason jars and Miracle Whip containers fit on these waterers so no need to buy the Little Giant jug.)

Food

Quail chicks need a game bird starter that's between 24% and 30% protein for the first 8 weeks. I use Purina 30% game bird/turkey starter crumbles for the first 8 weeks (Tractor Supply Company and Spike's both carry this product).

Between 8 and 10 weeks, I start transitioning them to my adult layer mix which is **one** part Purina 30% game bird starter and **two** parts Purina Layena 16% crumbles. This mix results in 20% protein and has the calcium needed for hens to lay strong eggs.

I've tried other game bird feeds from brands like Houle's (Spikes) and Dumor (TSC) and those have worked but I seem to have gotten the largest birds and eggs using Purina.

Milestones by Week

3 weeks - The quail will be fully feathered and you should be able to tell the males from females as Jumbo Brown/Pharoah/Wild coturnix are "feather sexable". Hens have a speckled pattern on their chest while males have a solid rust color chest. This is also when I'll often remove them from the brooder and put them in a grow-out cage. They still may need supplemental heat but they're more resilient at this point.

4 weeks - You may start hearing the roosters crow. It's a funny thing to hear for the first time.

5 weeks - The roosters might start getting aggressive so it may be necessary to separate them from the hens. It depends on their disposition. I've had peaceful and quiet roosters but there have also been some real jerks. I've tried to cull the aggressive ones from my breeding program.

6 weeks - The quail are about 90% grown and I'll usually butcher my excess males at this point. This is also when the hens may start laying eggs, they start between 6 and 8 weeks.

8-10 weeks - Congratulations! You've raised your quail to full maturity! The roosters will weigh between 10 and 14 ounces at this point while the hens will weigh between 12 and 16 ounces.

Ratio

The ***most important thing*** I've learned is that you shouldn't have more than one rooster to four or five hens once they're fully grown. The males will most likely beat up on each other and the hens if there's too much competition. Even with the right ratio, you may still see bald spots on the back of the hens' heads and possibly some feathers missing on their backs. This is normal and nothing to worry about as long as it's not excessive.

Light

Quail hens need about 15 to 16 hours of light to lay eggs. I use an LED rope light on a timer and have heard of people using Christmas lights. It doesn't need to be bright light.

Molting

Mature quail molt twice a year, usually in the spring and fall. They'll stop laying for a couple weeks during this period as they regrow their feathers. I usually bump up the protein % in their feed to help speed up the process.

Compost

Quail manure is great for the garden but it's high in nitrogen or "hot" so it needs to be composted for at least a year before used to supplement the soil.

Products - Just a few things I use for raising quail. I have the little thermometers in my incubators and brooder. Quail scissors are a must for easily getting into the eggs for cooking. I use the horizontal nipples in my PVC pipe/5 gal bucket watering system. Mature quail figure these out very quickly.



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