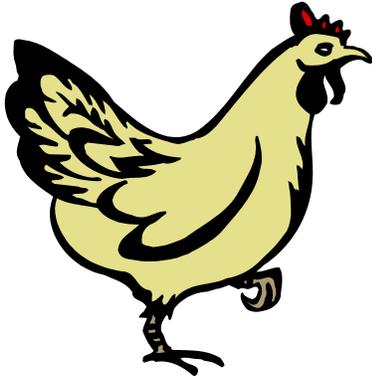


Tips for Safe Home-Produced Eggs

Producing safer, cleaner eggs

To prevent contamination of eggs, it's important to keep eggs as clean as possible and prevent them from cracking.



- If keeping chickens in a pen, some recommendations state that a minimum of 3 square feet per chicken for the indoor coop and 5 square feet per chicken for the penned outdoor run is adequate. However, the more space chickens have, the healthier and happier they will be, and the pen will stay cleaner.
- If chickens are allowed free range, do not collect eggs from outside of the pen for consumption because you do not know how old eggs are or with what they have been in contact.
- Keep the layer environment clean and dry. Use hay or wood shavings as litter in the pen and coop if necessary. Pens without litter can result in dirty, stained eggs from chickens stepping in manure or mud. Clean out wet or old litter in coop and pen regularly.
- For every four hens, supply at least one nest box for egg laying. Keep a thick layer of clean hay in the box.
- Keep roosts higher than nest boxes so chickens don't sleep in (and dirty) nest boxes.
- Encourage good eggshell strength to prevent cracking by keeping oyster shell available for hens to eat.
- Rats and mice can contaminate eggs. Control rodents in chicken pens; contact the UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension for details: 321-697-3000. Poison baits are NOT the best option.

Egg handling

- Collect eggs twice a day: in the morning and afternoon. (There isn't an exact answer for how long is too long for an egg to sit at a particular temperature before it isn't safe anymore. Therefore, if eggs are in our Florida heat very long, don't take chances, don't keep the eggs.)
- Any cracked eggs should be thrown away.
- Eggshells have a natural protective coating on them that helps prevent microbes from entering eggs. For this reason, washing eggs isn't consistently recommended by all sources. However, eggs may be exposed to contaminants such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella* or other contaminants which

stay on the shell and can contaminate food. Additionally, if you give your eggs to friends, keep in mind that they are used to buying commercially produced eggs from grocery stores and do not know how to properly wash eggs to remove contaminants. For these reasons, it is probably a good practice to wash farm eggs.

- Eggs should be cleaned *before* being refrigerated. If you collect eggs on a very hot day, then bring them inside and let them sit at about 70°F for a while before washing.
- Wash indoors using potable water from a sink. Egg washing can be done by wiping, spraying, pouring, or dipping, but soaking eggs for even a minute is dangerous because it allows microbes to enter the shell.



- **VERY IMPORTANT:** Wash eggs with water that is about 90°F (or 20°F warmer than eggs). If eggs are washed with water that is cooler than the eggs, it will force the egg to contract and pull water and microbes through the shell into the egg, causing contamination.
- A surgical hand cleaning brush can be used to clean debris from eggs. The brush should be dipped in bleach water after every batch of eggs that is cleaned.
- A cleaning product specifically for use on eggs may be used, (example: Manna Pro All Natural Egg Cleanser). If detergents are used, then rinsing is necessary; rinse water temperature should be a few degrees higher than wash water. Distilled white vinegar, diluted in half with water, may also be used as a cleaner and/or sanitizer for eggs. If cleaning, wipe each dirty egg with a new paper towel dipped in the vinegar solution.
- Eggs may be dried with paper towels (not cloth), or left on drying racks in the refrigerator to dry. *Do not put wet eggs in cartons.*
- Eggs should be placed small end down into cartons/flats.
- Cartons should not be reused, especially not cardboard cartons that can easily absorb contaminants.
- Eggs should be stored at 45°F, with humidity at 70%.
- Don't store eggs with materials that have an odor (onions, fish, potatoes, etc.) or they will take on that odor. Never smoke in the same room as eggs are stored-the eggs will take on the taste of smoke.
- Thoroughly inspect eggs for cracks before using or giving away.

Egg storage

Egg storage containers should be labeled with date collected, and used or given away within a week. This recommendation is based on the following:

- Eggs lose quality quickly once washed, especially if they are held at too high or too low a humidity level.
- If eggs have been held on your farm for a few weeks, shelf life is decreased already. If eggs are given to friends, friends may store them for a few weeks. Risk of contamination increases the longer eggs are stored.
- Once washed, farm eggs do not usually have sanitizers or oil applied as commercially produced eggs do, and therefore may not have as long of a shelf life.
- Shelf life for eggs should be considered to be five weeks.

Note: Product names are used for example only and do not imply guarantee or endorsement, and are not intended to promote any product over any other.

This factsheet compiled by the UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension
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