

•CHICKS

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Some online hatcheries now process orders for a small number of chicks, in some cases as few as three kept warm by a heating element, which can be a boon if you want an unusual breed or a selection of breeds that lay a specific egg color. Expect to pay a little more for the convenience of these specialty purchases. A typical minimum is 25, since that number ensures enough shared body heat for the chicks' journey.

Determine 4-H interests. Is your child interested in raising a pet, an egg producer, or a bird that will become dinner? Choose a breed appropriate to his or her needs. Recent interest in heritage breeds have made many "old" breeds available, so do consider the wide range of options.

Sex. You will need to determine if you are buying males (cockerels) or females (pullets). "Straight run" chicks are a mix of boys and girls and will be the least expensive option. Some breeds have "sex-linked" characteristics that reveal their sex (such as color). But don't be surprised when a few



of the "pullets" start crowing in adolescence!

Prepare in advance. Your chicks will need immediate attention, so it's critical that you set the stage for their arrival. You will need, at minimum, a brooder lamp,

thermometer, brooder with a layer of shavings, waterer, and feeder. Your "brooder" can be as simple as a cardboard box with flaps. Flaps are useful when you need to adjust the heat in the box up or down. Local feed stores will have most basic supplies, including chick

starter feed.

Getting them home. Charmingly, chicks still arrive via the post office. Be prepared to wait for the call and answer it promptly. While they manage being shipped quite well, your new chicks are depending on you to attend to their newborn needs: warmth, water, and food.

There are many resources for rearing chickens available to the young 4-H'er, including University of Kentucky's smallflocks.com and http://www.ca.uky.edu/smallflocks/KY_4H_poultry.html. For more information on 4-H poultry, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service.

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