



Perpetual dusk, lashing rain, soggy snowdrifts and a biting wind straight from the steppes of Siberia don't exactly combine to offer the most enticing prospect for lingering in the garden any longer than we absolutely must. It's precisely because of such conditions however that we need to offer our feathered friends extra care to see them through the cold dark winter months and ensure that they emerge phoenix-like in the spring, fired-up and ready to lay for England. Here then are some helpful hints for happy hens at winter tide.

Trench Welfare

Mud; glorious for a Hippo but for Chickens it's a no-no. Your little descendants of Jungle Fowl might be happy scratching amongst luscious leaf litter but allow their area to turn into a First World War battleground and they'll be reporting in sick faster than you can say 'Passchendaele' (or Gesundheit! for that matter).

In a devilish double-pronged attack, mud not only can contain a dangerous build-up of parasites and bacteria harmful to your little poultry platoon, but the constant damp and cold can also lead to a kind of 'Trench Claw', as well as the lethal Coccidiosis, which you really want to avoid. A [Ground Sanitising Powder](#) or purpose-made Poultry Disinfectant will help.

Whilst a concrete base for a Run can make it easy to keep clean, concrete itself can be a terribly cold, hard and unforgiving surface, so we find the best solution is [Hardwood Woodchip](#) (not Bark) and plenty of it. Hardwood Woodchip is the perfect winter floor covering by allowing any mud, rain and mess to drain through it, it will leave your Chicken Run or Pen clean and dry. Sprinkle with Ground Sanitising Powder or Disinfect monthly. We have used it for many years ourselves with great success.

This Old House

Your girls will spend more time housebound in the coming winter months than at any other time of the year, so it's well worth ensuring that your [Poultry Housing](#) is fit for purpose before winter sets in.

Firstly, check that everything is in good repair and that neither the rain nor wind can penetrate. Chickens really don't like the wet (the lack of webbed feet is a real giveaway!), so if your house is damp then now is the time to think about repair or replacement.

Draughts are another bugbear, particularly at this time of year. Whilst adequate ventilation is essential for health, a direct draught will soon turn your household of happy hens into very poorly poultry indeed.

If you would like further advice on Chicken Houses please call us on 01300 345229 or visit our page on [Choosing the best Chicken House](#)



Beddy Byes

When it comes to providing a cosy winter retreat, preparation is everything. Now is the time to give the house a really thorough clean with [Poultry Shield Liquid](#) which helps eliminate any dormant red mite, as well as any other mites and bacteria.

A deep layer of quality [Chopped Hemp Bedding](#) for your huddled masses is very important in foul weather, so it's worth spending some time to choose wisely. I recommend the dust-free [HempBed-E Poultry Bedding](#) particularly because of its high absorbency, good insulation properties and with Eucalyptus additives, it will collectively offer your girls the best chance of a warm, comfortable and disease-free winter.

[Aubiose Hemp Bedding](#) is also a very good alternative, but whichever you choose, do ensure that you put down a good thick layer on the henhouse floor and in the nest boxes, regularly remove any mess to discourage rats and the build-up of bacteria.

For peace of mind I'd also recommend sprinkling a powder disinfectant such as [Stalosan F Powder](#) or [Bio-Dri Hygiene Powder](#) on the floor as this will absorb much of the moisture as well as killing any opportunist bacteria.

A quick note here about Hay and Straw. Whilst seen by some as 'traditional' bedding, do also remember that 'traditionally' we also used to empty our chamber pots into the street - with much the same results! Straw rots when wet and has very low absorbency, soon leaving your ladies at the mercy of the damp and their own poo; which incidentally provides perfect conditions for potentially deadly mould spores to quickly develop. Like the Plague, some things really are better consigned to the history books!

Crazy like a Fox

All predators are at their hungriest during the winter months and will go to extreme lengths to tuck into a tasty chicken dinner.

Foxes and Badgers will regard traditional chicken wire merely as a trifling inconvenience and more of an opportunity to work up an appetite than anything else. All our houses and Runs are protected with strong galvanised Weldmesh for a good reason, so if you are relying on old fashioned chicken wire then the sooner it's changed - the better.

Rats, Stoats and Mink are also killers and can squeeze into the smallest of spaces in search of a sneaky snack, so check that your house and Run are free from rot, areas of weakness and even the tiniest of gaps.

On that subject, if you're considering a plastic house then do remember what the rats did to that plastic feed bin last year - that's just one reason why we use 1" thick joinery-grade timber for chicken houses and steel for feed bins!



Finally, remember that Foxes, Badgers and Rats are all accomplished tunnellers, so if you want to prevent them from making a 'great escape' with your flock then regularly check the ground around the house and Run for disturbed earth and for any gaps between the Run base and the ground. An [Anti-Fox No-Dig Mesh Skirt](#) gives added protection and will frustrate the most determined of predators.

Just the Tonic

Prevention, as they say, is always better than cure and the phrase could be no more apt when describing Worm and internal parasite control. Worms in chickens are the plague of most poultry keepers and very common. For detailed information about worms and how to treat them please see our page on [Poultry Worms - Treat and Prevent](#).

Just like all of us, Chickens are particularly susceptible to periods of illness during the chill winter months, so if you want to boost their immune systems then do consider adding some [Oregonico Poultry Tonic](#) to their water. This is an Oregano based herbal tonic, much beloved by poultry keepers, we find it is just perfect to keep the girls in tip top condition and boost their immune systems during the winter.

Do also remember that Moulting time is a particularly stressful (and cold!) process, and peculiarly often occurs in the colder months. To help our girls get back to full health during this winter wardrobe change we would recommend a tonic like Oregonico or high protein feeds to supplement the lack of worms and insects. High protein feeds or treats e.g. Mealworms, will provide the extra proteins they need to grow back feathers quickly (feathers are pure protein).

Speaking of feathers, don't forget that at this time of year many less-welcome and less-visible creatures will also be looking for a cosy home and a regular blood meal. Help is at hand however to combat these aspiring vampires in the form of [Diatom Powder](#) to liberally sprinkle around the Henhouse and [Louse Powder](#) for your girls' feathers and also for their bedding.

When the wind blows

I hate to see my girls huddled together against the whistling wind and lashing rain when they go outside to stretch their legs and indulge in a little light foraging. Constant bad weather has an adverse effect on any Chicken's health, so here are a few tips to mitigate the worst of its effects:

Firstly ensure that the pop-hole to your Chicken Coop is facing away from the wind. Do remember though that although our prevailing winds are south-westerly, if they veer to the east or north east they may be especially cold and you may have to turn the henhouse again.

A windbreak is also a good idea, especially if your girls are confined to a Run and cannot seek the protection of a nearby hedge - even a basic fence panel will do the job.



You could also think about fashioning a shelter in the garden. It doesn't have to be grand (or pretty) but it must be solidly built - the last thing you want of course is for it to blow over and prematurely spatchcook your flock!

With that in mind, do remember that after many requests from our customers we now offer our own purpose-built [Chicken Field Shelters](#) which are specifically designed with chooks in mind!

Shackleton's Bits

Equipped for a tropical climate, your descendants of 'Gallus Gallus' can require extra protection during freezing weather.

Frostbite can be a real problem for exposed wattles and ear lobes with unsightly blackened areas being the least serious result.

Prevention is easy though and just requires application of some [Battles Comb & Wattle Protector](#) to the fleshy parts. This forms a protective barrier against the elements, and the process of rubbing it in also helps stimulate blood flow back to their chilly bits!

Hothouse Flowers

Normal poultry housing does not require heating providing there are enough feathered inhabitants inside to create their own 'central heating' system. All our chicken houses have a recommendation for optimal occupancy, but even if your girls aren't lucky enough to live in a Flyte so Fancy henhouse, please give me a call and I will do my best to advise.

Please, please, do not be tempted put heaters of any kind in your Hen house, as you may kill your girls with kindness - overheating them whilst they are locked inside (remember dogs in hot cars?) or even inadvertently turning the house into a flaming barbeque.

When it is really cold however you can help your ladies by making sure they have a thick insulating layer of good dry bedding (see 'Beddy Byes' above) and some tasty [Smallholder Super Mixed Corn](#) before going to bed. The carbohydrate energy from the mixed corn will warm their cockles and help them to produce their own heat at night.

Essential Checks

As we all know, a human can survive for weeks without a proper meal, but mere days without water. Your ladies water supply should be checked at least once a day (ideally twice) to ensure that it is adequate, hasn't been knocked over, and hasn't frozen. If freezing temperatures are forecast then it is well worth investing in a [Poultry Drinker Heat Plate](#) as this will save a lot of trouble and ensure that your ladies have easy access to fresh water when they need it.

[Their Feed](#) can also freeze in extreme conditions, but never be tempted to put either feed or



water into the house itself. Not only do Chickens lose interest in chowing down at bedtime, but the water will increase the humidity inside the house and any spills will make the bedding and litter wet.

With wet bedding/litter being one of the prime causes of coccidial infections, and spilt feed attracting Rats from miles around I really can't emphasise this enough. There are of course exceptions to every rule (such as when you are confining birds and have no choice), but in all other cases ... don't do it ... please ... just for me!

Winter Blues

For a tantalising treat over winter you can give your girls a protein boost with some [Dried Mealworms](#), which they will absolutely love, but be careful not to give them too much!

With feathers being predominantly composed of protein, these protein-rich foods are particularly good to give after the moult when their bodies are trying to grow new feathers.

Long hours of self-imposed close confinement can lead to bullying and feather-pecking, habits which once established are difficult to break.

To relieve the winter boredom try hanging up a [Boredom Buster Pecking Ring](#) which will keep the troops entertained for days on end.

A...choooo!

Dark days spent in the Coop in close proximity with one another means that any outbreak of winter colds can spread very quickly. Any coughs and sneezes therefore should be dealt with as promptly as possible.

An all-round, almost-as-good-as-antibiotics product is [Oreganico Poultry Tonic](#) which we use on our girls and is a really brilliant natural medicine to keep the birds wheeze-free.

All the products highlighted above are available from this website in our [Health & Hygiene Section](#), and a selection of which are included in our very own [Winter Care Pack for Chickens](#).

We are of course always interested to hear of any new products that customers have found and think other chicken keepers would be interested in - do let us know.
Wrap up warm!

I hope this information helps when considering your poultry health and housing for the winter months. If you have any further queries please do contact us by email or our helpline 01300 345229.

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