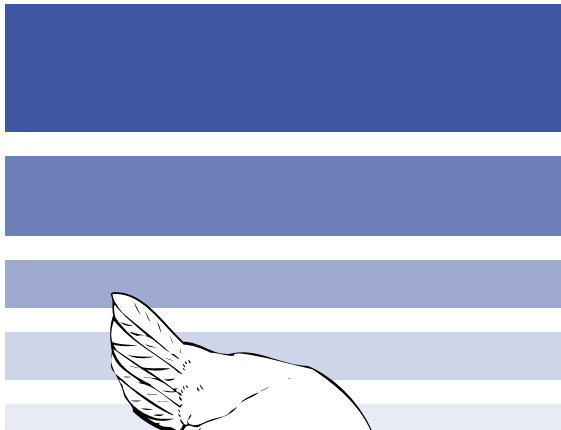


It is quite common for some hens in small flocks to suddenly begin consuming eggs. This is a habit, that once formed, is very difficult to eliminate. In fact, sometimes the only way to prevent the problem is to eliminate the offending hen.

Preventing Hens From Eating Eggs

R. Scott Beyer
Extension Specialist, Poultry Science
Animal Sciences and Industry



Hens will sometimes begin consuming eggs when an egg breaks by accident. Any method you can use to reduce the number of broken eggs available to the hens will help prevent them from consuming more eggs. A few general management strategies will reduce the number of birds visiting certain nests and reduce the overall incidence of broken eggs.

First, provide adequate numbers of nests. You should provide at least one 12 x12-inch nest for every 4 or 5 hens in your flock. The nest boxes should be placed in the darker area of your facility, and should be at least 2 feet off the ground. They should be designed to discourage roosting, with sloping tops and placed well away from any roof or overhang.

It is very important to maintain several inches of clean, dry nesting material in each box. Eggs can easily crack if this material is not adequate. Wheat straw is an excellent nesting material and usually is easy to locate and very inexpensive. Nesting material that becomes contaminated with broken eggs should be removed and replaced.

If too many hens begin laying within the same nest, try relocating the nest or moving the nesting material around. This will keep fewer eggs from being laid within the same nest which will reduce the incidence of egg breakage.

Remove eggs from the nest as often as possible, and properly store them to prevent foodborne illnesses caused by bacteria. Eggs should be stored below 40°F.

The stronger the egg shells are, the fewer will be broken during the laying process. Feed the hens a complete ration supplemented with calcium and phosphorus sources or oyster shells so that they receive enough calcium to develop strong egg shells. You may also consider supplementing oyster shells or limestone as free choice in a separate feeder.

As hens become older, eggshells become thinner and the internal egg quality is reduced. If the hens are approaching 1 year of age, consider allowing the hens to molt (see K-State Research and Extension publication number MF-2308). After molting, both egg shell quality and interior egg quality will be greatly increased. This is called “Cycling” and hens can be cycled several times. If the hens are several years old, consider culling them and replacing them with new pullets.

Reduce the amount of lights reaching the nesting area. This will reduce the incidence of cannibalism by reducing pecking. Also eliminate any noises or sudden movement which may cause the hens to bolt from the nest.

The easiest way to identify the offending hen is to

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observe the flock for a few days and notice if any have dried egg yolk on their beaks or sides of their heads. Once the offender has been identified, about the only way to prevent it from reoccurring is to eliminate the hen from the

flock. Egg eating is a very difficult habit to break and can increase as other hens observe the first hen consuming eggs.

There is nothing magic you can put in the feed or water to prevent consumption of eggs.

Eating eggs is not usually an indication that the hens are deficient in any mineral, vitamin or dietary supplement. It is more of a learned behavioral problem.

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