Egg-laying chickens

Commercial hens usually begin laying eggs at 16–20 weeks of age. Production increases, quickly reaching a peak of over 90 percent production at between 25 and 29 weeks of age then gradually decreases over the next year. By 72 to 84 weeks of age, flocks are often considered economically unviable because of low rates of production, and are slaughtered. Hens can be force-molted, a process by which egg production is stopped at one time in the entire flock and hens are rested, allowing their bodies to “re-charge” to re-invigorate egg-laying. Chickens can naturally live for 6 or more years, though ever decreasing laying rates, poor egg quality, and high rates of mortality make keeping hens this long economically unviable.

Broiler chickens

Broiler chickens, or broilers, are bred and raised specifically for meat production. They are a cross of a heavy bodied breed such as a White Plymouth Rock which is a relatively good egg-laying chicken and a very heavy bodied breed called a Cornish. Typical broilers have white feathers and yellowish skin. Most commercial broilers reach slaughter-weight at between five to seven weeks of age at 4.5 to 6.5 pounds live weight. Roasting chickens are raised to up to 10 weeks of age and may weigh over 10 pounds live. Non-commercial slower growing breeds, reach slaughter-weight at approximately 14 weeks of age, at a weight which is about the same that commercial broiler chickens reach at five weeks.

Broiler breeders

Broilers are usually slaughtered at approximately 35 to 49 days of age, well before they become sexually reproductive at 5 to 6 months of age. However, the bird’s parents, often called "broiler-breeders", must live to maturity and beyond so they can be used for breeding. Each broiler breeder hen produces between 160 and 200 eggs during its production life. Each hen will produce enough chicks to result in around 1000 pounds of broiler meat. Broiler breeder flocks will use one rooster for every 8 to 10 hens, resulting in around 1800 chicks weighing around 10 thousand pounds.

Definitions:

Bantam: Chicken or duck breeds that are distinguished by their exceptionally small size. These are usually kept by hobbyists, and have no commercial value

Beak: The hard and pointed protrusion composing the mouth and the nose of the chicken.

Biddy: An affectionate or slang word for a hen.

Breed: A group within a species with specific characteristics that distinguish them from other groups within that species.

Broiler: A young chicken that is usually less than 12 weeks of age and has been bred specifically for meat production. The Cornish Cross is the most popular form of broiler chicken and is used for most commercial meat production in the United States.

Brood: to care for a batch of baby chicks, or a name for the actual chicks themselves.
Brooder: a heated enclosure that is used to emulate the warmth that a mother hen will give her baby chicks. We often refer to a brooding area as the enclosure you will use when raising your chicks for the first 4-6 weeks. The brooding area is normally a well bedded area with a heat source, food and water.

Candle: To examine the contents inside of an intact egg, in attempt determine fertilization of the egg in a hatchery situation, or to detect blood spots or cracked eggs with commercial egg processing.

Cock: A male chicken or a rooster.

Cockerel: A male chicken under one year of age.

Flock: A group of poultry. Generally, most poultry will flock together and forage or graze when left to free range.

Free Range: A term used to describe birds that are allowed to roam a yard or pasture at will.

Hen: A female chicken. Adult hens that are currently laying are usually referred to as Laying Hens.

Hybrid: A cross breed that is usually bred with the intended purpose of crossing desirable traits of the parent chickens to produce an offspring with unique characteristics.

Incubate: Establishing and maintaining hatchable conditions for a fertilized egg.

Incubation Period: The time in which a fertile egg will need to be incubated in order for the egg to hatch. This time varies depending on the type of poultry, and sometimes even the breed of many types of waterfowl.

Litter: This term is used to describe the mixture of manure produced by the birds and bedding materials spread along the floor of a building. Typical bedding materials include: straw, hay, alfalfa grass, wood chips or shavings, etc. Most commercial broiler and turkey producers use wood chips, shavings, sawdust, or rice hulls, depending on cost and availability.

Molt: When a bird sheds many of its primary feathers and regrows them. Often this leaves many ducks without the ability to fly for several weeks, and the males often lose their colorful feathers that make them stand out during the breeding season.

Perch: The elevated place for a chicken to sleep at night, also called a roost.

Pullet: A female chicken under one year of age.

Roost: Same as a perch, this is usually an elevated area where the chickens will sleep at night.

Rooster: A male chicken. Same as a cock.
Vent: The outer opening of the cloaca through which the chicken passes both eggs and excrement (coming from separate channels).