

Reduce Heat Stress in your Poultry Flocks

How to keep your backyard flock cool on these hot summer days.

The normal body temperature of a chicken ranges between 104 – 107 degrees. Birds have no sweat glands and cannot sweat in order cool their body temperature. Body heat is lost through their combs, wattles and respiration. When the birds become overheated, they will begin to pant, spread their wings away from their hot body, begin to limit their activity and reduce feed intake. Like any animal or person, a bird that becomes overheated can get heat stroke, heat-induced stress or die.

Water

- o Have lots and lots of water available!
- o Move the waterers to where the birds are keeping cool, in the shade. Buy an automated dog waterer so there is a constant supply. Wrap stand-up waterers with insulation wrap. Put their waterer into a bigger bucket of ice.
- o Freeze bottles of water and add them to waterers throughout the day
- o On hot days with increased water intake, the bird's droppings can appear to be loose or watery, which is normal.
- o Add a poultry vitamin / electrolyte pack to their water to help with body stress

Make cool places

- o Have shade available – trees, shelters, tarps
- o Make a cool spot with a large garbage can on its side in a shady spot, add frozen water bottles/jugs inside for birds to rest next to.
- o Fill a cooler or an insulated plastic box with frozen ice packs / water bottles / jugs. Then have fans aim at the frozen bottles to angle towards the birds.
- o Buy a garden mister to put in the shade in their yard – this cools the air in that area. Do not allow the water to make large puddles in the yard.
- o Give them cool treats – frozen fruit and vegetables (corn, squash, watermelon, etc.)

- o Make dust bath areas in shady areas – dig a hole and add sand

Move the air in pens and coops

- o Open or crack doors, windows, and egg doors to promote airflow within the pens/coops
- o Put a fan in to move the air inside the housing

Temporarily change the coop environment

- o If the nest boxes are too confined and too hot, then close them up and use open type boxes, milk crates or a large basket with a small amount of bedding
- o Reduce your deep litter shavings to 2” high or replace shavings with sand
- o If you have artificial lighting, change the timer to come on at 2-3 AM. The birds can eat during the cooler temperatures in the early morning.

For waterfowl – supply baby pools so ducks and geese can submerge themselves

Emergency heat stress

- o If a bird is overheated (panting, wings held away from body) and is droopy, lethargic with pale wattles and comb – you can submerge the bird in a bucket of cool water up to its neck to bring the body temperature down. When the bird perks back up, gently towel dry.

(Great ideas from Kathy Shea Mormino and Two Creative Chicks)

(Handout from Dr. Helm, Clemson Poultry Health; Columbia SC)