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Beat the Heat

Keeping chickens cool during hot, summer days can be a challenge. Chickens need shade, water, and a well-ventilated chicken coop to stay cool during hot weather. Shade can be provided in a variety of ways including trees or building shade structures. When making shade structures, it is important to ensure they are well-ventilated to keep fresh air moving through the structure.

While it is important for chickens to always have access to clean, fresh water it is especially important in the summer. Placing waterers in the shade will help keep the water cooler, encouraging chickens to drink more. If chickens are roaming a larger area placing a few waterers spread throughout the area in shady spots will help encourage chickens to drink water by making it more convenient for them. Ice cubes or frozen water bottles can also be added to help keep the water cooler. An additional way to help chickens stay cool during extremely hot days is to provide water in shallow pans that the chickens can wade in to cool their feet, just make sure the water is changed daily to keep it clean and prevent coccidiosis.

During hot weather it is common for chickens to eat less. Because of their decreased appetite it is best to limit the number of treats and food scraps chickens are given to help ensure they eat enough of a feed ration that will fill their nutritional needs and support egg production. If treats are given, treats that will not be very filling and provide hydration are best. A few treats that help provide hydration are, cutting fruits and vegetables up and freezing them in blocks. Feeding chickens during cooler parts of the day such as early in the morning or late in the evening will also help encourage them to eat.

When it comes to nesting boxes, it is important to make sure the coop has plenty of ventilation to promote air circulation and decrease the chances of hens over-heating. If a hen is trying to be broody (set on eggs to hatch chicks) it is best to discourage her by collecting eggs as soon as possible. Hens that are broody are more likely to become heat stressed because they only leave the nest box a couple of times a day for food and water.

Chickens do not sweat and they cool themselves off through respiration by panting. Chickens that are heat stressed may pant heavily and hold their wings away from their body. If this behavior is seen take the chicken to a cooler area with plenty of shade and water. Signs of heat exhaustion in chickens are: panting hard, holding their wings away from their body, their waddle and comb appearing paler in color, and acting very lethargic. When a chicken has these symptoms, they are in danger of dying from heat exhaustion and need to be cooled down

quickly. To cool them down quickly, place their body in a bucket of cool water (make sure their head is above the water) and place them someplace cool until they have completely recovered.

It is much easier to prevent heat stress than to treat it. Making sure chickens have plenty of shade and cool water will help chickens avoid heat stress during the hot summer days.

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