

## Egg eating chickens

Help my chickens are eating their own eggs! There is nothing worse than finding that one or more of your chickens has developed a taste for the eggs. All you find when you go to collect the eggs is a sticky mess in the nest box. You don't know if they are all doing it or if it just the one and if it is one, which one.

Do your chickens have a Calcium or Protein Deficiency?

First of all you are not alone. Egg eating is a common problem. It can be started by an accidentally broken egg allowing the birds to gain a taste for them. It is therefore important to reduce the opportunity that the hens have to break eggs in the first place. If they have a lack of calcium in the diet the shells of the eggs may become thin. This allows the potential for breakage to increase. The birds then find a supply of calcium in the broken shell and develop a taste for the protein. Similarly a lack of protein can encourage birds to eat their own eggs. Once a bird has found some food the other birds will gather round. If you notice them eating an egg try to see which part they are most interested in, the shell or the yoke. If it is the shell then a calcium deficiency would be indicated.

Are there Too many Chickens in One nest Box?

If too many birds are sharing a nest box there is again, a greater chance of getting accidentally broken eggs and the birds developing a taste for the eggs. Make sure that there are no more than four birds per nest box. Also make sure that the nest box is in a dark area. This will reduce the traffic in that area hopefully ensuring that the birds visit this area to lay only.

Are Your Chickens Bored?

Another possible reason for egg breaking is boredom. Birds that have access to a range appear to suffer less from egg breaking. This could be because they have more to do. Try feeding them different, more difficult feeds. A cabbage hanging down, just within reach. A maize cob thrown on the floor so that they have to pick each seed out. You can also purchase feed supplements that come in a block that you can hang up. Not only are these blocks creating something to do they will also adjust any deficiencies in the diet which maybe causing the egg breaking.

False Eggs may Help Deter your egg eating chickens.

False eggs, (porcelain, or marble eggs) or golf balls can also help. Put a couple in each nest box. The culprit will then discover that they can't eat all eggs. Make sure, if you do have a problem, that you collect the eggs as often as possible, leaving the false eggs behind.

### Summary

1. Common problem
2. Collect eggs frequently
3. Correct any possible deficiencies i.e. calcium or protein deficiency
4. Ensure appropriate number of chickens per nest box
5. Hang up other food/supplements
6. Try using false eggs

Steve Merritt, 2009

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Key words

chickens, egg breaking, calcium, egg eating, egg shell