

## **KEEPING CHICKENS HAPPY THROUGH WINTER**



**Winter means cold weather, icy conditions and long nights. There are some things you can do to make the winter months more manageable for your chickens.**



- Don't forget pest control during the winter months. Parasites such as red mite can still survive in housing despite cold weather. Keep up with regular worming as well.
- Don't be tempted to shut your chickens inside just because it's cold. Exercise encourages warmth and is essential for their wellbeing. But a thorough clean and check of your housing and enclosure is essential!

### **Housing checks**

- Check roofing as harsh weather can easily damage roofing felt.
  - Ensure your housing has adequate ventilation – keeping birds in crowded stuffy conditions will predispose to respiratory disease so don't be tempted to make them too snug inside their house.
  - Vermin can become a bigger problem during winter as they take advantage of the shelter of your hen house! Check daily for signs of rodent infestation: droppings, gnawed holes in the wood, and downtrodden grass alongside fences where rats and mice form paths. It's a good idea to raise the hen house at least 8 inches off the ground if possible, to reduce their access.
  - Wet cold weather can encourage rust – check all locks and fastenings to make sure your housing stays fox-proof.
  - It is important to keep chickens as dry as possible underfoot and this can be more of a challenge in autumn and winter. Dry litter allows the birds to scratch around; in addition, damp litter will predispose to bumble foot and can quickly become mouldy. Damp, mouldy litter may contain mycotoxins, which can cause respiratory disease, eye irritation and neurological problems.
- Shortage of food during winter can make predators more likely to seek out your birds, so take extra care putting the chickens away during the dark evenings and maintain your housing carefully.
  - Frostbite can be a problem for chickens during very cold weather. Daily application of a smear of Vaseline on their combs and wattles can help protect these sensitive areas from the frost.
  - Frozen water drinkers can be a big problem. Keep drinkers empty overnight, refilling them first thing in the morning. But check drinkers and their access regularly, breaking ice and clearing snow if necessary.

