

# 12 Steps to Breeding Mealworms for Chicken Food

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Are you searching for affordable **chicken** treats? Learn about breeding mealworms for **chicken** food. It's a very inexpensive DIY project that your chickens will love.



When we decided to get **chickens**, I knew I wanted to make it as easy and affordable as possible. The costs of non-GMO feed can really add up (we don't have a big enough property for the chickens to get all of their nutrition by foraging).

I started looking into ways to feed our chickens more sustainability – both because I love being sustainable and because I don't like spending money when I don't have to.

We had talked about [vermicomposting](#) in the past, but the idea of raising mealworms to feed our chickens popped into my head. I got online to see if it was feasible for us to do it at home and I was pleasantly surprised by how easy it appeared to be!

It only takes maybe 10 minutes a week to maintain them (depending upon the size of your colony), and as our colony grows, we'll have an endless supply of treats for our chickens!

Zoë and Kaylee love that we're breeding mealworms for [chicken](#) food and are excited to call themselves worm farmers!

These are the Supplies You Need to Get Started

- 1 A few plastic containers or drawers to store the mealworms in. We use a 3-drawer plastic storage unit. If you're going to use plastic containers with lids, you need to drill holes in the lids for airflow.
- 2 Edible bedding for the mealworms. You can use a variety of things like [oats](#), wheat germ, chicken feed, corn meal, etc. You also need a moisture source such as sliced apples, potatoes or carrots.
- 3 Mealworms. How big do you want to go? We started with 2,000 mealworms, we got [Live Organically Raised Mealworms from Amazon](#). We can always add more if we need it. If we end up with too many worms, I figure we can sell them locally for fishing. I ordered our mealworms from Rainbow Mealworms, but they are also available on [Amazon](#) from multiple sellers.
- 4 Something for the worms to hide under, like egg cartons, folded cardboard, newspaper, etc.

## 12 Steps of Breeding Mealworms for Chicken Food

- 1 Fill your bottom drawer with the edible bedding (I used a combination of whole wheat [flour](#) and [oats](#) because it's what I had on hand). You should have at least a 1-inch layer (more depending upon the number of worms).
- 2 Place slices of potato, apple or carrots on top of the [oats](#). If you use something with more moisture, place them on a piece of cardboard so you don't get mold in your drawers.
- 3 Pour your mealworms into the drawer.
- 4 Put your egg cartons or cardboard in to help the worms hide from the light (they don't like light).
- 5 You should keep them in a warm area (around 78° F is ideal) to encourage the process along. You'll need to add more potato, carrot or apple every few days and remove any dried out pieces.
- 6 A lot of people will pull out dead worms, but I have been leaving them in there since other [mealworms](#) will eat them! The chickens will also eat them (I figure they're not much different than the dried ones you get at the pet store).
- 7 The worms will begin to turn to pupae when they are 12-18 weeks old. Our started to pupate about 2 weeks after we received them. They will be very light at first and then turn darker. A lot of people will separate the pupae into a separate container so they can keep

- track of them, but I have just been keeping them in the same container with the larvae (worms) for now. I may separate them in the next cycle because I just read even the larvae will eat the pupae.
- 8 A week or two later, the pupae will start turning into beetles (darkling beetles). They will be white – almost clear – when they first hatch. They will slowly get darker after a week or so.
  - 9 It's important to separate the beetles into a new drawer as soon as they start emerging so they lay eggs in a new section (they'll start mating and laying eggs within a day or two of hatching). Prepare the drawer the same way you prepared the first drawer. Put a **date** label on the drawer so you know when they were put in there. The beetles don't fly, so you don't have to worry about them getting out. But you should keep the containers covered to prevent pests from getting in.
  - 10 Two to three weeks later, move all of the beetles to a new drawer one level up, being careful to only transfer the beetles. You want to keep all of the bedding in the drawer so you don't lose any eggs in the transfer (eggs will also stick to the bottom of the drawer). The beetles will continue laying eggs in the new drawer.
  - 11 The eggs will hatch after about two weeks under ideal conditions, so it's important to move the beetles every 2-3 weeks so they don't eat the baby mealworms. It will take newborn mealworms 12-16 weeks to pupate.
  - 12 As the process goes on, you may need more than 3 drawers (depending upon your setup) since I read that the beetles typically live for around 3-4 months. I have another 3-drawer unit available if we need it. Just repeat this process over and over again.

\*\*\* Or you can always get a **premade vermicomposting system**. \*\*\*

### **Mealworm Breeding Tips**

- 1 Do not buy "giant" mealworms, as they're often treated with an insect growth hormone, which discourages them from becoming beetles (so they'll continue growing larger). If giant mealworms do become beetles, they'll be sterile.
- 2 One beetle can produce up to 500 eggs (higher humidity = more eggs), so our **2,000 original worms** (assuming 50% females) could easily morph into 500,000 worms pretty quickly with a higher humidity level!
- 3 You need to change the bedding every 3-4 months and replace it with fresh bedding. You can use a sifter to sift out the worms from the frass (waste). It's a good idea to store the frass in a separate container for a month or so before using or discarding it to see if any worms emerge. The frass is a great fertilizer for your garden.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LczqEONN1Ho>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=db--p1Cp908>