Spring Chicks, The Natural Way

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  Chicks A Few Days Old

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  Chicks are 3-4 weeks old

This marks the start of our sixth flock to date and the fifth spring that we enter raising chooks as chicks. What's different about this year however is that for the first time we hatched our own. The natural way. We must tell you that it has been extremely exciting and rewarding to watch the transformative process. From the time our broody Australorp plucked out all of the feathers from under her belly to the dawn we found the first chick chirping in the nesting box along her side.

In the past we have always purchased our chickens from other breeders. Throughout the process we have experienced both joy and pain. We have learned to become very resilient flock shepherds through the multitude of casualties we've experienced and for a number of reasons which we suspect. Chook owners know more over time, but even after we have

conducted a necropsy, sometimes you just never know why your little feather friend died. Then we remember natural selection and survival of the fittest doesn’t always make sense. Nature has a way of showing you tiny details and intricacies of life that may have gone unnoticed before, when everything appeared to be perfect. It is under the ruffled feathers that you find many questions left unanswered. And yet somehow you have the urge to try again.

So, this season it is extremely rewarding for us to watch mama hen take ownership of 11 brown, white, and blue eggs in her nest. We watched as a few more eggs were laid each day in the same space by the Leghorns, Barnevelders, and Ameraucanas. Only 7 hatched and we buried the others in the garden. Each one of them is unique in their own way by the day of the week they were born which earned them names of which to keep.

The first egg that hatched was blue and an Ameraucana. It had been at least twenty-one days when we noticed a fracture in the shell. Over a period of more than six hours she pecked her way out of her shell. Chicks can live for four days after they’ve hatched on the nutrients supplied from the inside of their shell. Remarkable the way that nature works eh?

One by one they hatched and we brought them into their temporary brooder. The goal was to

reintroduce mama hen
to her chicks after they'd all hatched, but she was so stressed out from the
extensive incubation period that when she left the nesting box we could tell
she was relieved. So we let her find her zen again to sow and scratch in peace.

The youngest chick is nearly two weeks behind the oldest and Thursday, the only Australorp that hatched was born January 7th. She took a couple of days to get out of the eggshell. She was exhausted and we were not sure that she'd pull through but shorty is hanging with the best of them today. Sunday, Ameraucana the first was born January 27th, then Wednesday Ameraucana the 2nd (30th), Sunday the first Leghorn (3rd), and two Leghorns hatched on Monday (Jan 4th). One Barnevelder hatched on Tuesday (5th). By now a few of them are about a month old.

For more information on raising your own flock we highly recommend:

Harvey Ussery *The Small-Scale Poultry Flock*

Gail Damerow *Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens, and The Chicken Health Handbook*