

Growing up....

Moving the Keets to a Pen

At 6 weeks of age, the keets are now ready to be moved to a pen, especially if it is during the warmer summer months. They'll have a lot of energy and will want to start spreading their wings and finding a perch to sit on. Be certain that the holes in the pen are small enough to prevent escapees. Keets will go right through a dog kennel type wire, but you can place bird mesh or smaller wire mesh on the outside. It will not be long before they flutter upward and go over this panel if it is not all the way to the top, so keep that in mind.

Don't forget to put an inexpensive mirror in their pen, as keets just love to look at their reflections. They also love little tunnels to hide in and perches at several different levels, several feet off the ground to the top of their new pen.

Be sure to give the birds enough room in a pen. They will need 2-3 feet for each bird in the pen. Remember, they aren't chickens and they need plenty of room to run around. Do not be surprised if they flutter upward. Perches in a low area to begin will encourage their upward movement.

Compiled from various sources and personal experience

WHAT YOU NEED:

1. Plastic or metal watering base for a mason jar;
2. Metal feeder-round 8 hole for six keets or less, a long 14 hole for more keets or if you aren't there all the time to refill;
3. Brooder box-I use the egg boxes that are free from the grocery store. They are approximately 16" x 28" and will hold 15 keets for a few weeks and haven't been sprayed with insecticides. You'll need a wire or screen over the top. Keets learn to jump very early and can get out without a top!
4. Bedding: the textured shelf liner is good as it can be hosed off and line dried; after the second week out can add wood shavings (not cedar). I like the artificial turf so I can hose it each day and reuse. I keep several of these and just clean and reuse. Newspaper can be used as long as it's covered with paper towels.
5. A heat light, preferably with a hooded shade to maintain a 95-degree temperature the first week, decreasing by five degrees each week until the temperature equalizes with outside temperatures or the keets are fully feathered. In the summer, a 60-watt bulb is adequate and place it at one end of the box so they can get away from it if they get too warm. ALWAYS check temp!
6. Miscellaneous: White millet seed for training.; dried mealworm for treats and training; oyster shell (calcium) after four months for egg layers; and grit. If you have plenty of small rock around, grit isn't absolutely necessary. Greens (untreated), melon bits, etc.

GUINEA FOWL ARE....

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Guinea Keets—baby your babies

Guinea keets need a clean, enclosed area to grow up in. You can make them a box out of plywood, use a child's swimming pool (the hard plastic kind) or even press a large aquarium into use. The purpose of having a solid-walled enclosure is that it needs to retain heat well. Keets require a warm, draft-free environment for the first 1-6 weeks of life, or until they are fully feathered. The temperature under the lamp for their first week should be approximately 95 degrees Fahrenheit, and then decrease the temperature 5 degrees for each week thereafter, until fully feathered. Be certain you have a wire top for your enclosed area.

Depending upon the size of the flock, you can use a regular 60-watt light bulb to keep them warm. However, the pig-tail variety of light bulb may not provide enough warmth for the keets. Use the round-type bulb for keeping your keets warm. If you have a large flock, use a brooder lamp in the enclosure to keep the keets warm.

Beware of the "donut effect" when you place a brooder lamp in an enclosure. If the lamp is too close to the floor, the keets will only stay in the outer perimeter of the light source (laying down in the shape of a donut). If the light temperature is just right, the keets will lay down directly under it and in the surrounding area.

Make sure that there is an area far enough away from the lamp that the keets can get to if they are too warm. Guinea legs in general are prone to injuries so take care not to capture them by their legs or feet, either as keets or adults.

The Right Food

Keets need **turkey starter** or **wild game bird starter**, not chicken starter. It should also be the **medicated** variety. The reason for this is that Guinea keets are VERY active birds and they need a high protein diet. If you don't provide them with the right food, they will grow, but not as fast or as healthy as they could. If your local feed store doesn't offer it, ask them if they could order it for you. Alterna-

tively, some hatcheries sell the correct type of feed you'll need and can ship it to you before they ship your keets. Sprinkle some of the feed on the bedding at the beginning to encourage them. Eventually they will eat from the feeder. Keep the feeder full- you will be amazed at how much they eat!

At 6 weeks of age, switch to **turkey or game bird grower**. **WHENEVER CHANGING OVER TO A DIFFERENT FEED, MIX HALF OLD FEED WITH HALF NEW FEED**. This will avoid digestion upsets and they will be more likely to accept the new feed.

Keets love insects and greens. I give mine cut up clover leaves and grass and introduce them to beetles, stinkbugs and small insects starting at about a week. Be sure the greens and bugs have not been exposed to insecticides, herbicides or fertilizer. Put a bit of grit in with the babies feed every few days. Treats are dried mealworms and white millet. Start offering very young and you become the food god or goddess!

The Right Bedding

If you've raised baby chicks before, you're probably thinking that you can replicate your success with keets. One of the biggest mistakes that keet owners make in the beginning is using wood shavings as bedding. Don't do this! Keets will eat wood shavings and will die from it. They will choose the tiny pieces of bedding to eat before they'll eat their feed. Instead, buy several rolls of **paper towels** and roll it out on the floor of the brooder each day. It provides a surface that they can easily grip, and it can easily be picked up and thrown away when soiled. Change the paper towels at least once a day, and you'll have happy and clean chicks that aren't in danger of dying from ingesting wood chips. Paper towels also give traction, reducing the possibility of leg splaying or hip issues. **(NOTE_ I use rubberized shelf liker)**

Alternatively, owners can make a brooder that has a hardware cloth floor. This allows waste to fall through the bottom of the pen so that the keets aren't walking on it.

If you look into the brooder box and see your keets lying still as death with tiny orange legs and feet stretched out behind them, **DO NOT PANIC!** They are sleeping ever so peacefully. At even the slightest noise, they will scurry around

like little jets. Talk to them often and slowly lower your hand into their box. Try putting some feed in your hand to get them used to the hand and feed together. They learn speed very quickly as well as the ability to jump very high and very soon. Be sure you have a screen or wire to keep them contained in their box.

Also important to remember: Watch for pasty bottoms or feet coated with feces (droppings) Pasty bottoms can prevent proper waste elimination and most often occurs with keets that are a few days old. Use a warm, wet cotton ball to gently clean the area. Be prepared as the warm wetness may stimulate a fecal ejection.

Poop shoes, as I refer to the buildup of droppings on the feet can cripple your keets as it dries to a very hard crust which after a day or so the keet will start "high stepping" when walking becomes difficult. So it's important to know what causes it and what to do if it happens. Most often this occurs with overcrowding (too many keets or too small a box), or not changing the litter or paper towels often enough. If you have this problem, soak the feet in warm soapy water and use a cotton ball soaked in the solution and gently wipe the feces off. Do not pull or pick the matter off, as the very tender skin or a toenail will come off risking an infection. This is a problem that is best avoided by changing the litter often and making sure you have enough room for the number of keets.

The Right Water Source

Keets are very tiny when they first arrive, so they need slightly different care when it comes to a waterer. While some farmers may have the nipple-type waterers, the majority of bird owners have the familiar red-base chick waterer. To make this safe for the tiny keets, place clean marbles in the water trough. You don't need to fill the entire waterer with the marbles, just a handful that will keep the keets from falling in and drowning. As the chicks grow, the marbles can be removed after the keets large enough not to fall in and drown.

For the first few weeks, I put a supplement of minerals and vitamins in the keets water. This is available at the local farm market. Keep your container clean as they will mix feed in the tray daily!