Understanding Chicken Molting: What It Is, Why It Happens, and How to Help

## 🪶 What Is Molting?

Molting is the natural shedding of old feathers and the regrowth of new ones. Most chickens molt annually, usually in the late summer or fall, but it can also occur after periods of stress, illness, or a change in light exposure.

During a molt, chickens typically:

- Lose feathers in a specific pattern (head, neck, chest, back, wings, then tail)

- Cease or dramatically reduce egg production

- Look ragged or temporarily bald

- Act more withdrawn or irritable

## ⏳ The Molting Timeline

Molting doesn’t happen overnight. It unfolds in stages:

Week 1–2: Sudden feather loss begins. Coop may look like a pillow exploded. Egg production drops.

Week 3–6: Pin feathers (thin, dark shafts) emerge. Chickens may act sore or skittish.

Week 7–12: Feathers continue growing in. Behavior begins to normalize.

Week 13–16: Final feather growth finishes. Egg laying may resume gradually.

## 🧬 Molting and Breed Differences

Certain breeds molt more dramatically or more often than others. For instance:

- Leghorns often go through a 'hard molt,' losing many feathers quickly.

- Orpingtons and Cochins often molt more slowly but less severely.

- Silkies have fine feathers; their molts may be harder to spot.

- Older hens molt more slowly and less efficiently than younger ones.

## 🐔 Flock Dynamics During Molt

Molting can shift the social balance in your flock. Chickens instinctively peck at anything that looks different or vulnerable.

Tips to manage pecking:

- Provide more space to reduce stress and aggression.

- Offer multiple feeding and watering stations.

- Use distraction treats like cabbage heads or a flock block.

- Apply anti-pecking spray or isolate targeted hens.

## 🥚 Molting and Egg Laying

Egg production almost always drops during molt. Feather regrowth demands enormous energy and nutrients, especially protein.

Don’t worry—this pause is natural and allows hens to focus on feather regrowth.

## 🍳 Molting Nutrition: What to Feed

During molt, switch to or supplement with a high-protein diet (20–22% protein). Layer feed typically has only 16%.

Good protein-rich add-ons:

- Mealworms, tuna, black soldier fly larvae

- Cooked eggs, sunflower seeds, crickets

- Roasted, unsalted soybeans

Also provide oyster shell, grit, and fresh water.

## 🧹 Preparing for the Molt

Get ahead of molting season by:

- Deep-cleaning the coop

- Inspecting for lice and mites

- Supplementing vitamins (especially B vitamins and amino acids)

- Stocking up on protein-rich feeds and snacks

## 🚩 When Molting Isn’t Normal

Signs that something else may be wrong:

- No regrowth after 4–5 weeks

- Bare areas without pin feathers

- Birds acting sick or lethargic

- Scabby or red skin indicating mites or lice

## 🌟 Final Feathers: Encouragement for Chicken Keepers

Molting may look rough, but it’s a vital part of a chicken’s life cycle.

Keep protein high, stress low, and give them time.

Before long, your hens will be back to looking their best with fresh, glossy feathers.