END OF THE FIRST MONTH

Your chicks needs more space for living, eating and drinking as it grows. It may be necessary to switch to larger feeders and waterers (if you haven’t done so already).

At about four weeks of age chicks are about half feathered. Heat can be reduced, but not yet discontinued (especially at night).

FEATHERS

The feather is a unique part of the bird. All birds have feathers, and no other animals do. Feathers replace many functions of the skin in other animals, such as providing protection from the elements and helping regulate body temperature. Feathers also help streamline the body for flight.

Types of feathers. There are various types of feathers, each with a specific function. Quill feathers are found on the wings and tail, while contour feathers are the outer feathers covering the wings and body. Plumule feathers lie next to the body and are fluffy to provide the insulation needed to retain body heat in the winter and minimize absorption of environmental heat during the hot weather.

From the time a chicken is hatched until it becomes an adult, feathering passes through several changes of appearance. These changes are due largely to replacement of the feathers (molting). All feathers of fully grown birds are replaced by molting, usually at regular intervals.

Chickens are covered with a dense coat of down when they hatch. The first molt is already underway, for a few second-generation feathers appear above the skin within a few days, if they are not already apparent. This molt is eventually completed though it may take a long time. In Single Comb White Leghorn chickens, natal down feathers may persist and be concealed by juvenile feathers long after they have disappeared from the face.

The second molt usually begins within 4 to 6 weeks after hatching. In many species of birds, including chickens, natal down is still present on the head and the sides of the body. As already mentioned, the first molt takes several weeks and often has not finished before the second molt begins. It takes 2 to 3 months for the third plumage to replace the second plumage all over the body.

SKIN

The skin of a chicken is thin and pliable since the outer cover of feathers provides a protective cover. The skin possesses feather tracts that arrange feathers in a definite pattern. Feather tracts are easily identified on the plucked bird or even on the live feathered bird since they are raised above the general skin surface. A major anatomical feature of the skin of birds is that it does not contain any sweat glands. There is only one major oil gland, the preen gland, located at the base of the tail. The oil is removed from this gland when it is squeezed by the bird’s beak, and then the oil is spread over the body feathers by the bird’s preening with its beak.

Specialized types of skin are found on various parts of the bird. The comb and wattles are unique skin types highly turgid in nature, while the scales of the shanks and toes provide a horny, hard type of covering. The beak is actually covered with a thin layer of skin. The earlobes are another rather special skin part.
Look at the feathers on the wing of your chick. The short feather in the middle is the axial feather. There are 10 primary feathers on the outside of the axial toward the wing tip. There are also 10 secondary feathers on the other side of the axial. Figure 1 illustrates what the wing feathers look like.

Figure 1. Wing feathers of a chicken.

Figure 2. Parts of the chicken.