

Hens Lay Eggs

Eggs are laid by hens (female chickens) on farms. Hens begin laying eggs when they are 4-6 months old. A good laying hen will produce 6-7 eggs per week for the first 1-2 years of her life.

There are many varieties of laying hens, but White Leghorns are the most common.



White Leghorns reach egg-laying maturity early, adapt well to different climates, and are known for consistently laying a large number of white-shelled eggs. They have a relatively small body size and can produce over 250 eggs a year.

Eggs come in various shell colors, although there is no nutritional difference between different colored eggs. The shell color depends upon the breed of the hen. An egg's shell color is determined by the color of the hen's earlobes. White hens have white earlobes and lay white-shelled eggs. Hens with red feathers and red earlobes lay brown-shelled eggs. Most retail eggs are either white or brown, but you may also see greens or blues in some stores. Hens live in barns. They eat a grain-based diet that includes vitamins and minerals to keep hens healthy.

On a farm, eggs are collected every day. They are gathered frequently and refrigerated quickly. Warm temperatures lower the eggs' freshness and quality.

Watch the video *Hens* to learn more about laying hens.



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Eggs are Washed

All eggs in the United States are washed with a specialized solution of warm water (106° F) and soap to clean and sanitize the eggs and remove any contaminants (manure, grease, yolk, etc.) before they are sold to consumers.

After washing, the eggs are sprayed with a warm water spray containing sanitizer to remove any dirt and debris. Removal of contaminants prevents egg spoilage by bacteria.

Strict federal regulations specify the procedures and food-safe cleaning compounds that may be used to wash eggs. Most eggs are cleaned in mechanical washers that use sprayers, brushes, detergent-sanitizers, rinsers, and dryers. A dirt detection system is used to find eggs that are dirty. This system uses multiple cameras to find eggs that have spots on them. Any dirty eggs are rerouted back to the washer.



Watch the video *Eggs Part 2* to learn more about how eggs are washed. Begin watching the video at minute :27 and end at minute :45.



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Eggs are Checked for Cracks

Egg shells are the first barrier to keep bacteria from entering the egg. Cracks in egg shells create a food safety risk due to bacterial contamination.

Large cracks can easily be seen with the human eye or by candling the egg (holding the egg up to a light). Microcracks in the shell are

more difficult to detect. Microcracks are very small cracks in the shell surface that reduce the protective barrier benefits of the shell. Microcracks are not easily seen with the human eye.

Crack detectors check the eggs sonically. Tiny probes tap each egg and listen for the sound it makes. The machine taps the egg multiple times while listening to the sound it produces. If a crack is detected, the egg is removed from the production line.



Watch the video *Eggs Part 2* to learn more about how eggs are inspected for cracks. Begin watching the video at minute :45 and end at minute 1:15.

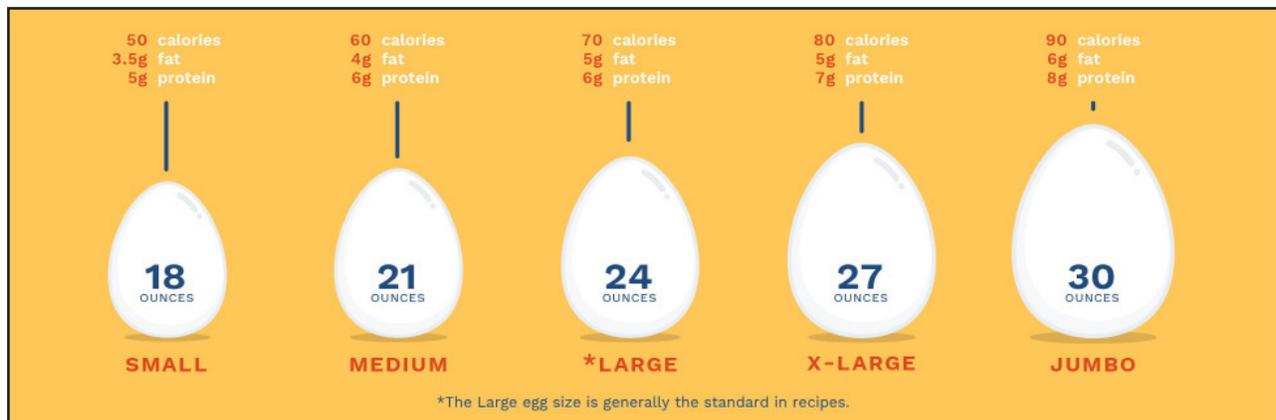


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Eggs are Sized

The age, breed, and weight of the hen influences the size of an egg. As the hen ages, her eggs increase in size. Egg size is one of the factors considered when the price of eggs are determined. Egg size is determined by the average weight per dozen eggs. While some eggs may look slightly larger or smaller than each other in the same carton, the weight of the dozen eggs as a whole determines their class size.

All eggs are sized for consistency when packaged. The eggs are weighed by electronic scales and packaged according to their size based on weight. Eggs come in small, medium, large, extra large, and jumbo. In recipes, large eggs are generally the standard.



Watch the video *Eggs Part 1* to learn more about the factors that influence the size of an egg. Begin watching the video at minute :34 and end at minute 1:11.

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Eggs are Graded

Eggs are graded into three classifications according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grading system—AA, A, and B. The grade of an egg is determined by the inside and outside quality of the egg. Eggs are inspected for quality using special lights. This process is called candling.



Grade AA eggs have thick, firm whites and the yolks are free from any defects. Their shell is clean, smooth, and oval in shape. Grade A eggs have a slightly lower interior quality. Grade B eggs may have slight stains and be irregular in shape. They are not sold in supermarkets, but are used in powdered or liquid egg products. There is no nutritional difference between the different grades.

USDA AA GRADE	USDA A GRADE	USDA B GRADE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Egg white thick and firm○ Yolks high, round & practically free from defects○ Clean, unbroken shells	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Whites are reasonably firm○ Yolks high, round & practically free from defects○ Clean, unbroken shells	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Whites may be thinner○ Yolks may be wider and flatter○ Shells unbroken, but may show slight stains○ Usually used in liquid, frozen & dried products

Watch the video *Eggs Part 1* to learn more about how eggs are graded. Begin watching the video at minute 1:14 and end at minute 2:00.



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Eggs are Packaged and Shipped

It takes between 48 to 72 hours from the time an egg is laid until the time it leaves for the restaurant or grocery store. They are packaged by size based on weight and by grade. Expiration, sell by, best by, and/or use by dates are burned into the egg cartons. Many cartons also show the USDA grade seal in addition to the brand, size, number of eggs, and nutrition label. Carton labels may also indicate the



producer, Julian date (the pack date), and instructions about how to properly store them. For egg cartons featuring the USDA egg grade shield, there will be a 'P' number stamped on the carton, near the Julian date, identifying the facility that packaged the eggs. For those eggs that are not graded by USDA inspection, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires the carton to have the name and place of business where the eggs were packaged or distributor information so the source of eggs can be traced in the event of a food safety situation.

Whether made of pulp, foam, or clear plastic, the carton protects the eggs from breaking or crushing, bacteria, and loss of moisture. New packaging designs are continually being tested to provide the best protection for the eggs. Eggs are placed into the cartons large end up to keep the air cells in place and the yolks centered.

The egg cartons are packed into boxes and moved into a refrigerated room for storage until they are transported to stores. Eggs must be refrigerated. They will age more in one day at room temperature than in one week in the refrigerator. Eggs are transported to the grocery store in refrigerated trucks.



Watch the video *Overview* to learn more about packaging and shipping eggs.
Begin watching the video at minute 1:50 and end at minute 2:06.

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