

Tips for Buying an Incubator

By Clayton Botkin

Bird keepers in any way, shape or form usually want to keep an incubator on hand in the event that their birds are at least one step of the way to successful reproduction in producing eggs. Here are some tips to consider if you are in the market to seek an incubator:

- Ask questions! The sales rep should be able to answer your questions about capacity, operation, power requirements, and general hatching requirements. Remember, each species is different in their requirements, so the person you are speaking to may not be familiar with your individual species.
- Evaluate the size of the machine to fit your operation. The size of the incubator you need will depend on the species of birds you rear, the number of eggs you may expect at any given time, the number of eggs a female will produce, and the space you have available for storage.
- Confirm that the rating (the number of eggs the manufacturer estimates for capacity) is close to the actual incubation, hatching, or combined capacity of the machine. The sales rep and other consumer reviews should support this.
- Ensure you understand the correct price of the machine. If you are looking for a deal, evaluate the reviews of a low-cost incubator, and ensure the machine will satisfy your requirements. When buying an incubator, the lowest cost unit may not always be the best. Remember, companies do not usually include the cost of shipping or tax in the list price of a unit. What you can afford to spend on an incubator will depend on what you are prepared to commit to successful reproduction of your birds.
- Understand what you are getting with your incubator. Many manufacturers offer various options and models of incubators. Be sure the one you select will fit your needs and the requirements of your species. If you are unsure of what is included with your purchase, ask the sales representative to clarify for you.
- Buy your incubator early! Waiting until you have eggs that need to be set is not a realistic idea for purchasing an incubator. Buying a machine in the spring, at peak season, is likely when costs will be highest, and you run the risk of suppliers having low inventory, causing further delays on top of premium prices. Always pad the shipping time of a purchase with an additional week, to account for problems or delays.
- Open, inspect and start your incubator on arrival. Ensure all parts and pieces are complete and functioning normally. Do not wait to do this, even if you aren't using it right away. It is better to know sooner, rather than later if a machine is not working correctly or parts are missing.
- Be aware of warranty requirements. If registration is required, follow manufacturer instructions as soon as it arrives so it is not forgotten. It is important to realize that the sales rep is not a technician, and may not be able to diagnose problems or troubleshooting. Usually, warranty is handled by the manufacturer. Most of the time, a sales company is not the manufacturer. The sales company only receives and handles the product, normally without even opening the boxes to ensure the customer gets the same product they are purchasing.
- Manufacturers, unless otherwise specified, are the ones responsible for warranty concerns. They have the technicians on hand who developed and are intimately familiar with their products and technology. You can probably save yourself valuable time and money by

contacting them first with your concerns about malfunctions and operating errors. They will be able to diagnose issues faster and likely more accurately than a sales rep. They will also know where the closest replacement parts may be.

- If a shipment is received with clear damage, note it to the delivery agent before signing for it. This important step will ensure that there was a flag raised for an insurance claim. Contact your sales rep if you suspect an incubator may have been damaged in shipping. They will be able to handle the claim and hopefully supply a replacement unit as fast as possible.
- If you are unhappy with a product, or the product was not what you wanted, contact your sales rep. Don't jump to social media to complain. Lots of manufacturers monitor social media for product feedback. If they see that you have not contacted them before making accusations or insinuations, your response from them may be less than favorable.
- If you have used a product, and then are unhappy with it, don't expect to be able to return it. Unfortunately, incubators must be considered contaminated once an egg has been placed in it. The return of a used incubator is highly unlikely as it could be potentially contaminated with disease. It is a severe risk to a facilities biosecurity accepting this unit. To relate, you would not return a used hair brush to the store where you purchased it. Manufacturers will provide parts to repair a malfunctioning incubator, but their acceptance of its return is not likely. It is important to realize this before using an incubator and make sure it is the incubator that fits your needs.
- Beware of poorly manufactured products. Many incubators are now being manufactured overseas, at much lower prices than those from recognized brands. They are likely cheaper for a reason, which should cause you to be wary. Remember, these are units that operate at a relatively high temperature for extended periods of time. The plastics and components that make up an incubator must be of the highest quality to facilitate surfaces that are easy to clean and maintain safe operation. Lower quality components may not afford these traits.
- Only use the recommended cleaning agents by the manufacturer. Avoid corrosive materials and ensure you only clean the approved surfaces. If you have questions about cleaning, contact your sales rep or the manufacturer.