What to feed a baby duck

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Fridge cheat sheet

FOUND A WILD DUCKLING?

1. Look for the hen and brood first. If they are close, help it rejoin them, for example over a curb.
2. No family after a careful look? Treat it as an orphan.
3. Keep it dry. No sink, tub or pond.
4. Don't feed bread or force food or water.
5. Call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator today.

Find a wildlife rehabilitator near you: ahnow.org

Found ducklings: what to do (San Diego Humane Society): sdhumane.org

Safe staples

- **Duck or waterfowl starter** – About 20% protein, niacin added, free choice
- **Grower or maintenance feed** – About 16% protein from week 2
- **Unmedicated chick starter plus niacin** – Fallback. Add 100–125 mg niacin per gallon
- **Water** – Always beside feed, deep enough to dunk the bill
- **Chopped leafy greens** – Finely chopped, floated in water. No spinach
- **Duckweed** – Natural, protein-rich, float it in water
- **Chick grit or coarse sand** – With treats or greens. Not oyster shell

Small amounts only

- **Peas** – Thawed, a few at a time, in water
- **Corn** – Treat only. Corn-heavy diets cause deficiencies
- **Oats** – Plain cooked or rolled, small amounts
- **Rice** – Plain cooked. Raw rice swelling is a myth
- **Iceberg lettuce** – Mostly water. Darker greens are better
- **Grapes** – Quartered, occasional treat
- **Banana** – Small pieces now and then
- **Strawberries** – Chopped, occasional treat
- **Blueberries** – Halved for ducklings, a few at a time
- **Watermelon** – Bite-sized pieces on hot days
- **Mealworms and bugs** – High protein. A few, not daily
- **Cooked egg** – Plain cooked, chopped, occasional
- **Tomatoes** – Ripe flesh only. Never leaves or green fruit
- **Bird seed and scratch** – Small handful only, with grit

Never feed

- **Bread** – No nutrition, linked to angel wing
- **Crackers, chips and salty snacks** – Salt and fat strain legs and kidneys
- **Popcorn** – Salted, buttered junk food
- **Avocado** – Persin damages the heart
- **Onion and garlic** – Destroys red blood cells
- **Citrus fruit** – Interferes with calcium uptake
- **Chocolate and caffeine** – Theobromine and caffeine are toxic
- **Milk and dairy** – Ducks are lactose intolerant
- **Medicated chick starter** – Not approved for ducks; use unmedicated
- **Layer feed and oyster shell** – Too much calcium before the first egg
- **Raw potato and green peels** – Solanine in green parts and peels

Feeding schedule

Age	Looks like	Food	Amount	How often
0–1 week	Fluffy yellow, brown or black down; wobbly; dunks its bill after every bite	Duck or waterfowl starter, about 20% protein, unmedicated, plus water	Free choice; each duckling drinks about half a gallon of water a week	Feed and water in reach at all times. Never feed without water
1–2 weeks	Growing fast, still all down, messy around the waterer	Starter crumbles or mini pellets, water, chopped greens	Free choice; don't let the feeder run empty	Feed and water at all times
2–4 weeks	Bigger and louder; first feathers start near the end of week 4	Grower feed, about 16% protein; small treats begin, with grit	Free choice feed; treats under 10% of the diet	Feed and water at all times
4–8 weeks	Feathers growing in; makes its own waterproofing oil from about 4 weeks	Grower feed, greens, duckweed, a few treats	Up to 2 tablespoons of treats per half cup of feed	Feed and water at all times
8–16 weeks	Near adult size by 8–12 weeks; hens quack loudly, drakes hiss from about 10 weeks	Grower or maintenance pellets, greens, grit	Complete feed at least 90% of the diet	Feed and deep water at all times
16 weeks and up	Adult plumage; first eggs at about 18–26 weeks, by breed	Maintenance feed; layer feed or oyster shell once the first egg appears	Complete feed at least 90% of the diet	Feed and deep water at all times