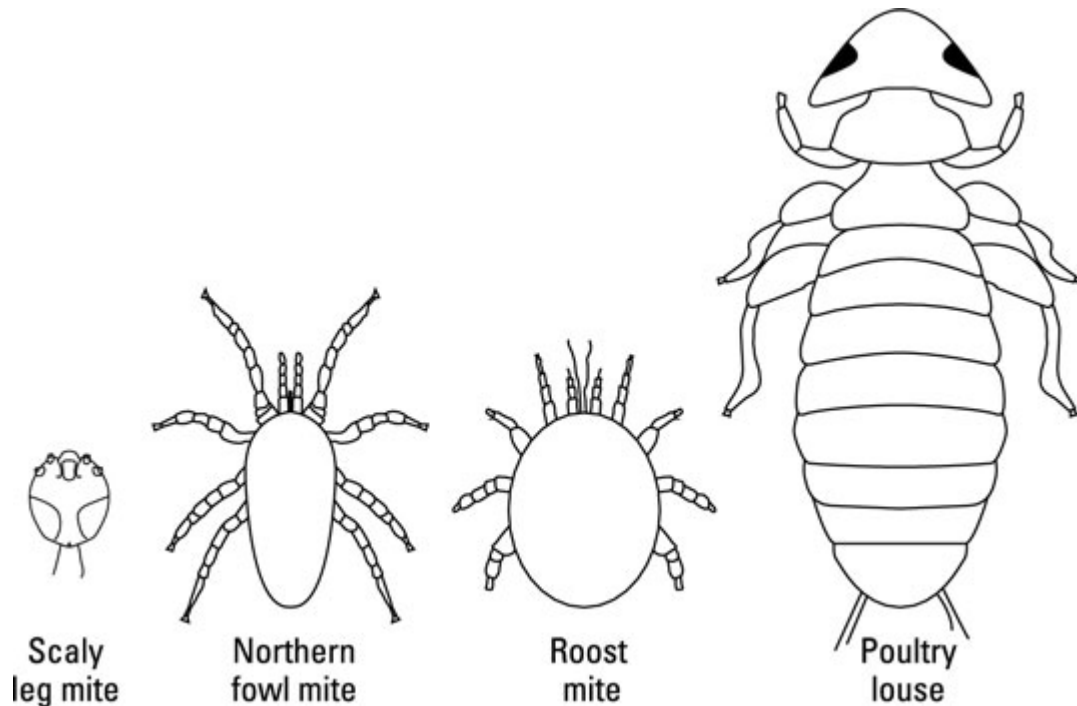


Poultry External Parasites — Lice and Mites

Poultry lice and mites are extremely common external parasites of chickens. You can spot these critters before they get out of control if you periodically pick up and examine chickens in your flock.



Credit: Illustration by Barbara Frake

Poultry lice

Poultry lice are wingless, straw-colored insects that feed on dry skin scales, scabs, and feathers. A poultry louse spends its entire life on its bird host; if it falls off the bird, it won't survive long in the environment — maybe a few days. Lice know what they like, and poultry lice like chickens, not people or pets. If a poultry louse climbs on you, it won't stay long.

Louse infestations are a drag, especially for young chickens, making them jumpy and slow to grow. Fertility and egg production declines for infested adults. The plumage of lousy birds looks patchy and moth-eaten.

Female lice lay their eggs (*nits*) in clumps on feather shafts. Inspect birds at least twice a month, spreading the feathers in the vent, breast, and thigh areas, looking for nit clumps or pale, scurrying insects. Fall and winter are when most louse infestations are common.



Credit: Photograph courtesy of Dr. Tahseen Abdul-Aziz

Mites

Mites are tiny relatives of ticks and spiders. A long list of mites infest chickens.

Northern fowl mite

The *northern fowl mite* is a serious pest of poultry, and this mite has also been found scurrying on wild birds, rats, and people. These mites are blood-suckers, and in heavy infestations, they can cause blood loss, stunted growth, decreased egg production, weakness, and even death. They eat anytime, day or night.

The mites congregate in the vent area; feathers there may be blackened by mites and mite excrement. If you pick up and handle a bird with northern fowl mites, the mites climbing your arms and hands may creep you out.



Credit: Photograph courtesy of Dr. Tahseen Abdul-Aziz

Four main sources can introduce the northern fowl mite to your flock:

- Chickens
- Transport coops
- People
- Wild birds

To patrol for a northern fowl mite infestation in your flock, pick up and examine the vent areas of several birds every two weeks.

Roost mite

The *roost mite*, also known as the *red mite* or *chicken mite*, is also a blood-sucker that feeds on poultry and wild birds. The roost mite has a different modus operandi, however; it feeds on chickens only at night and hides in the coop, on roosts, or under piles of droppings during the day.

To spot a roost mite infestation, you need to examine birds at night, looking for dark moving specks, or inspect the coop. Roost mites congregate in cracks and crevices inside chicken houses, seen as tiny red or blackish dots clustered together. Another tip-off: Hens may refuse to lay in infested nests.

Roost mites are spread the same way as northern fowl mites: poultry, people, equipment, and wild birds (pigeons, especially). They're difficult to eradicate from poultry premises, even after the chickens are gone, because roost mites can live for months without eating.

Scaly leg mite

Scaly leg mites spend their entire lives in the skin of their bird hosts, burrowing tunnels under the scales of the legs and sometimes into the skin of the combs and wattles. Crusty scabs and lumps appear on the scales of the legs of older birds. Long-term infestations result in deformed toes and limping. Scaly leg mites are transmitted bird to bird and by contact with an infested bird's environment.



Credit: Photograph courtesy of Dr. Tahseen Abdul-Aziz

Scaly leg mites are too small to be seen without a microscope. If you suspect a scaly leg mite infestation, you can scrape crusts from an affected bird's leg, put the scrapings in a container, and have a veterinarian or diagnostic laboratory examine the sample.

Prevent and treat poultry lice and mites infestations

Lice and mites are born slobs; they like a damp and dirty coop, so general cleanliness can make your coop less hospitable to these unwelcome guests. Here are some additional measures to protect your flock:

- **Quarantine all new birds for 30 days before letting them meet your flock.** Inspect new birds for external parasites at least twice during the quarantine period and treat them if necessary.
- **Thoroughly clean transport coops after use.** You can dislodge hitchhiking pests with a thorough cleaning.
- **Discourage wild birds from hanging out with your flock.** To do so, use bird netting, screened coop windows, or scare tactics.

To control lice or mites, you can treat both the birds and the birds' environment. Because roost mites spend so much time off the chicken and living in the coop, treating only the birds will fail to eliminate the problem.

If you diagnose poultry lice, northern fowl mite, or roost mites, treat all the birds in the flock at the same time. Isolate any chickens with scaly leg mite from the rest of the flock while they're being treated.

Be patient, and don't expect to get the situation under control with one shot; repeated treatments are necessary. Lice and mites can develop resistance to pesticides, so vary your method and alternate treatments.

External Parasite Treatments for Chickens			
Pesticide	Effective against	Uses	Forms
Camphor	Scaly leg mite	Chicken's legs and feet	Ointment
Diatomaceous earth (DE)	Lice, northern fowl mite, roost mite	Chicken, coop, dustbath	Powder
Garlic juice	Northern fowl mite	Chicken	Spray
Neem oil	Lice, northern fowl mite, roost mite	Chicken, coop	Spray
Petroleum jelly/sulfur mix	Scaly leg mite	Chicken's legs and feet	Ointment
Pyrethrin and permethrin	Lice, northern fowl mite, roost mite	Chicken, coop	Powder, spray, dip
Sulfur	Lice, northern fowl mite, roost mite	Chicken, coop, dustbath	Powder, spray
By Julie Gauthier and Rob Ludlow from Chicken Health For Dummies			

Eggs Laid at the Boulder County Fair - Poultry External Parasites — Lice and Mites

The Poultry Team hopes you have read the information above about the control of lice and mites on your poultry.

DO NOT USE ANY other treatment methods on birds you are planning on exhibiting at the Fair.

Why you ask?

Eggs that are laid at the Fair become the property of the poultry team and are sold after Fair with the profits being returned to the barn for awards the following year.

If you use anything other than what is listed above, it has the possibility of being passed onto the bird and ultimately the egg.

What this means?

All eggs would have to be destroyed – which is a waste on many levels.

DO NOT USE:

Ivermectin – this is used to kill internal worm infestations
Frontline Flea & Tick – this is for cats/dogs – not approved for poultry, can get in eggs, indefinite end date
Adams Flea & Tick spray or powder – not approved for poultry use
Rose Dust – some forms have Malathion, a highly toxic organophosphate pesticide
Sevin Dust – banned for poultry use. Toxic carcinogen
Carbaryl – chemical name for Sevin – kills bees and aquatic insects

Giving a chicken a medication that isn't labeled for use in chickens is called *extra-label drug use*, and it's illegal in the United States unless a licensed veterinarian who knows you and your flock prescribes the medication. To stay on the right side of food safety rules, use over-the-counter medications only as directed on the label, or consult a veterinarian.