

# Selecting litter bedding materials



**Bedding material is an important component of a meat chicken's environment. It absorbs moisture, mixes with fresh droppings, insulates and cushions the floor, supports a rich microbiome, and allows birds to display preferred behaviours.**

Many different types of bedding material are available, but they may not be suitable for chickens due to:

- the size of material particles
- their ability to absorb moisture
- potential contaminants – chemical, biological and physical.

Dry bedding material might be dusty, which may negatively impact chicken respiratory health. Alternatively, bedding material that is too wet needs to be dried before chicks are placed.

The type of bedding selected usually depends on cost and availability.

## Bedding selection

The Australian chicken meat industry traditionally uses wood shavings, sawdust, rice hulls or straw as bedding. Fresh bedding must be absorbent, fast drying, affordable, readily available and safe for chickens and workers. Varying availability and cost of these materials prompted the investigation of alternate options. For more information, use the [online litter screening and search tool](#).

## Contact

### Mark Dunlop

Senior Principal Scientist (Environment)  
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Queensland)

[mark.dunlop@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:mark.dunlop@daf.qld.gov.au)

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Each bedding material requires its own in-shed management, and sometimes pre-treatment, to get the best results from the litter and to keep it in a dry and friable state.

Having a greater volume of litter or using more absorbent materials may slow down how quickly the litter becomes wet. However, regardless of the bedding material chosen, it will still need active management to remove any excess moisture.

## Common bedding materials

**Wood shavings** (hardwood and pine) are absorbent, fairly consistent in quality and do not normally require additional preparation prior to chick placement.

**Sawdust** is a denser material capable of holding more moisture. It may require drying and sieving/screening to remove larger particles or dust.

**Rice hulls** have proven to be a good litter material, although they hold less water than other materials and excess water may soak through to the bottom of the litter. Where they are available, rice hulls are the preferred bedding material of many growers.

**Straw** has been used successfully but needs to be chopped into lengths 20 mm or less and preferably crushed. This makes the material more absorbent and reduces caking problems. Some growers have found it beneficial to add a layer of sawdust with the straw to improve moisture management and reduce caking.

## More information

Search the [online litter screening tool](#).

Read the '[Review of fresh litter supply, management and spent litter utilisation](#)' report.

Download '[Potential contaminants and hazards in alternative bedding materials and proposed guidance levels: a review](#)'.



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