

**Lynn Oliver's woodchuck-mothering general-guidelines-at-a-glance.** Updated 2019.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Short physical description</b>	<b>Approx weight</b>	<b>Feeding frequency</b>	<b>Other info</b>
Birth	Pinkies. Look like little pink hippos. Naked, eyes closed, no teeth. Can vocalize.	25–40 grams	6 or 7 times/day/incl night *feed according to milk belly*	Be sure to keep warm without overheating. Roughly 93° works well with humidity. Incubator is great.
1–2 weeks	Skin becomes pigmented as fur grows in. Ears/eyes still closed. Approx 2 inches long.	40–60 grams	6 times/day/incl night **feed according to milk belly**	Be sure to keep warm without overheating. Roughly 93° works well with humidity. Incubator is great.
2–3 weeks	Gaining weight steadily; has short fur all over. Eyes still closed. Ears opening more. Scooting around more. Lower teeth begin to emerge at about 3 weeks. Approx 3–4 inches long.	60–80 grams	5–6 times/day/can generally cut out middle of night feedings	Move heat to one side; put in larger tub; add rodent chow to their sleeping baggie. Incubator still fine. Might be able to reduce heat at bit as they fur up.
3–4 weeks	Still gaining. Scooting around more, might be vocalizing. Can climb out of tub at this point!	80–100 grams	5 times/day	Might need to move to a tub; introduce “pickings” from yard so they start to learn the smells.
4–5 weeks	Eyes beginning to open (blueish hue); ears open. Upper teeth emerge about 4 weeks. Approx 4–5 inches long.	100–200 grams	4/5 times/day; introduce to bowl eating (messy for a few days)	Should be in large tub or wire cage; add litter box with dirt; add lots of yard pickin's; introduce bowl and soft veggies.
5–6 weeks	Eyes and ears open; fully furred with short, thick fur. Toddling around. Bodies look like potatoes with legs. Approx 5–6 inches long.	200–300 grams	3/4 times/day	Should be in large wire cage with litter box; should be eating greens; introduce crunchier veggies; give stimulation (wodent wheel, branches, things that smell interesting).
6–7 weeks	Larger, moving more, digging, playing. Approx 6–8 inches long.	300–400 grams	2/3 times/day as supplement to natural foods	Keep increasing natural foods as much as possible. Lots of greens. Larger caging as necessary.
7–8 weeks	Mini versions of adults; should be very active; might run away when humans approach; might be clicking teeth in defense. Growing like weeds. Eating like no tomorrow. Approx 8-9+ inches long.	400+ grams	1/2 times/day if you feel they can use it. Judge by how well they look and how much natural food eating. Won't hurt.	Move to outdoor caging with area or box for digging; continue to provide natural enrichment and natural foods.
8–9 weeks	Getting bigger; might be molting. Approx 10–12 inches long	600+ grams	Milk if they're runty or had a bad start in life. Feed natural foods at will. Replenish throughout the day.	Should be in large pre-release caging with digging area. Lots of hiding places; lots of enrichment.
10–14 weeks	Should be large: approx 12 inches or longer.	1000+ grams	Feed natural foods at will. Replenish at least two times/day.	Should be hiding when you come around; should have a burrow dug, be it ever so humble; should be strong and can climb; should be eating lots.
14–16 weeks	Approx 14–16 inches long and weigh 6–8 lbs	6–8 lbs	Feed natural foods at will. Replenish at least two times/day.	Should be looking wistfully out of the cage; might be trying to dig out or climb out. Sometimes self-release at this age. Can soft or hard release. Either way, seek out APPROPRIATE HABITAT.

## Take-Home Points for Raising Woodchucks

1. Don't freak! They're basically BIG SQUIRRELS when it comes to raising them, **except for their aspiration and escapist tendencies.**
2. They are growing SO large SO fast, it's OK (once they are doing well on formula) to increase amount fed to more like 10% (than the standard 5% rule of thumb). And if you hit the 8/9/10+ week mark and they still want formula, LET THEM HAVE IT. It'll do no harm. They'll know when it's time to stop and it helps their fast-growing bones. (I use Fox Valley 32/40.)  
**Hint:** when ready to train to use a bowl, start with a human baby spoon and spoon-feed, then you'll need to teach them to LAP it instead of SUCK it. Once lapping, stop syringe-feeds and give them food in a jar lid or non-tip bowl. I thicken their formula with a baby rice cereal and sometimes tempt them with a bit of apple sauce or other sweet baby-food.
3. They will use a litterbox. Take advantage of that. I like to use Equine Pine.  
**Hint:** To start, I use 'clean dirt' from my garden because it really seems to stimulate them to 'go,' then I gradually swap that out with the Equine Pine pellets (easier to clean). Continue stimulating them by hand and leave a dirty tissue (or whatever you use to stimulate) in the dirt until you SEE them going on their own, then you can cease stimulating. *Note: you won't always get poop from stimulating, but you should always get pee. They tend to poop as they waddling around until the age where they start to bury it.*
4. The first foods should **INCLUDE TONS OF YARD PICKINS:** dandelion, plantain, clover, etc. That way they are "imprinted" to knowing what to look for once they are released.

**Hint:** I offer to weed neighbor's gardens to keep up with supply and demand. Keep the weeds FRESH – they don't like them limp and soggy. If you're planning on raising woodchucks, GROW YOUR OWN weeds or garden greens! Collect dandelion and plantain seeds. Purchase wildlife-planting seeds at a local farm store.

5. They can "suck the paint off the walls." Go for a layered sucking device: sometime fat to fit their mouths, yet skinny inner delivery system to slow the flow. And keep a snot-sucker handy just in case.  
**Hint:** To layer an 'original' Miracle Nipple into a human preemie nipple, cut an X in the preemie nipple. Insert just the upside-down shaft of a 1 or 2cc syringe through the X to the inside of the preemie nipple. Stuff the Miracle Nipple in, the flange inside the preemie nipple; then carefully pull the syringe shaft out, along with the tip of the Miracle Nipple. Leave it in place through the season, unless you see formula getting in between the two nipples, then take it apart and disinfect it.
6. They should instinctively know how to dig. If you can't provide a large pre-release digging area in the ground, get creative: use a large tub filled with dirt; or a trash can; or an above ground swimming pool. As they dig it out, refill it. It gives them stimulation and helps build muscles.
7. They are SMARTER than you think. If there's a way to get out of your caging, they will find it! Be prepared to try to outsmart them along the way.
8. Enrich their lives with new foods, new toys, things to smell, new bedding, etc.

9. Don't worry too much if they "really like you." Their instincts will kick in and they'll want to go when it's time. If you are concerned about their friendliness: you CAN overwinter them where they can safely hibernate (lots of insulating blankets in a dog house or bin, in a basement; outbuilding; outdoor area with underground den where it's about 40° and you can monitor them). When they wake up, they'll usually be ready to go free after a couple of weeks.
10. Those teeth can do damage. Be careful. If you need to control a wild adult, CONTROL THE HEAD.
11. Don't let them become friends with dogs! They need to know that four-legged beasts mean danger.
12. If you must do a hard release, find an old abandoned building with a porch they can live under; an old, collapsed building; an abandoned woodchuck den; or a large brush pile. Don't release them where there's dangerous roads or known predators. Leave a stockpile of food near by, but not right where they'll be hiding (so you don't attract prey), and a bucket of water; a carrier with bedding or other place to den up, in case they need it. Make sure there's PLENTY of natural food sources at the release site: lots of greens; weeds; overgrown fields; woods nearby; water source.
13. I'm here for you, as others were for me when I started. I'll gladly talk you through issues or concerns. Woodchucks are a joy to raise and I think you'll come to love them as much as I do. (Also, consult with OTHER woodchuck rehabbers.)  
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