

# Portable fencing

## creates multiple paddocks, helps eliminate overgrazing

**G**rass needs grazing to thrive and a rest period to recover.

Overgrazing is really a function of time and not necessarily acreage, stock numbers, or even stock density. A good rotational grazing system grazes the grass plant once then allows an adequate rest period for the plant to recover.

Electric fencing can be the most cost-effective method of controlling the time stock graze a given area. Don't hesitate to seek help with a grazing or watering plan and fence design and placement. There are many configurations that allow control of many species, including horses, cattle, sheep, and goats.

Another factor that will influence the design is wildlife. A fence that must coexist with deer and elk may have a substantially different design than one that does not.

Permanent, multi-strand, high-tensile electric systems are a good choice for the perimeter of a pasture. The number of wires will vary according to the animal involved. Horses and mature cattle can quite often be contained with three wires while small calves, sheep, and goats may require five or six.



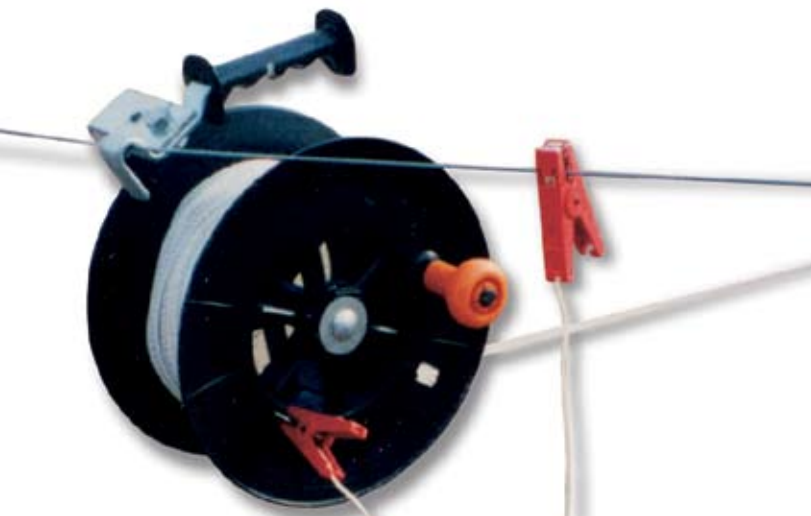
There are two common mistakes people make when trying high-tensile fencing for the first time: Posts too close! Wires too tight!

Post spacings of around 50 feet are adequate. The wires should be tightened just to the point of removing most of the sag between posts. Solid fiberglass posts have proven the best to use in areas with snow loads and wildlife. There are no plastic insulators to break, and the flexibility of the post helps to overcome side loads.

For interior cross-fences, a mixture of high-tensile permanent and portable "polywires" and tapes often prove best. Try to create paddocks by placing several permanent cross-fences on obvious topographical changes, not forgetting to include stock water inside the paddock or access down a lane to the water. Ditches can also be a water source if grazing irrigated pasture. Two wires are usually adequate for mature cattle and larger calves, while three wires are a better choice for horses or cattle with smaller calves.

Use portable "polywires" and "polytapes" on handy reels for some internal fencing. Plastic "treadin" posts with multiple wire lugs are the most adaptable. They can be placed at 30- to 50-foot spacings and the wires tightened by hand. One charged wire may be sufficient on irrigated pasture with horses and mature cattle but, when on dry soils or winter-grazing on frozen soil or dry snow, a ground wire run with a hot wire may be needed. Spacing between the wires is very important and is dependent upon the animal.

Portable fencing allows the greatest flexibility in changing paddock size and allows rotations to match the growth of the plant. Aim for the shortest



grazing period per paddock needed to harvest the available forage, say one to four days, then a minimum 30-day rest period during fast plant growth. As plant growth slows, adjust to five to 10 days grazing and 60 to 80 days of rest per paddock. Multiple paddocks are needed to reach these levels of rest but, by subdividing with portable electric fencing, it becomes achievable.

There are also a few methods of constructing the fences to help in maintenance and troubleshooting.

The heart of any electric fence system is the power source or energizer. A 110-volt plug-in energizer is generally recommended over a battery or solar unit because more of one's dollars can go to power and not batteries, solar panels, etc. This is not to say a battery unit is unacceptable; they are a great choice but only if you don't have 110-volt power available. Also, get specific recommendations as to the size of the energizer by matching it to the job at hand: How long is the perimeter fence? What type of animal are you controlling? Does the fence run through high vegetation? Will you add on to the system eventually?

All these questions will help a supplier match an energizer to one's needs.

Lastly, consider investing in a digital voltmeter designed to monitor fences and energizers. They are hand-held meters that measure the voltage output of an energizer or at any point along a fence line. They are invaluable for diagnosing any problems.

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## *Barnyards & Backyards* workshops Practical information for rural living enthusiasts

*These workshops will have speakers and sessions that will help every landowner better manage their land. A combination of classroom and hands-on activities will give attendants tools they can use.*

### **April 22, Casper**

Contact Tom Heald, Natrona County Cooperative Extension Service office at 235-9400 or [theald@natronacounty.wy.gov](mailto:theald@natronacounty.wy.gov)

### **May 13, Cheyenne**

Contact Laramie County Conservation District at 772-2600

### **May 18, Wheatland**

Contact Platte County Cooperative Extension Service office at 322-3667

*For details on these and other events happening across the state, visit [www.barnyardsandbackyards.com/](http://www.barnyardsandbackyards.com/) and click on "Events"*