



WHAT IS A CHICKEN TRACTOR?



By Jeff Edwards

A chicken tractor is a different way of saying “mobile chicken coop.”

Why mobile? To prevent build-up of manure inside the structure.

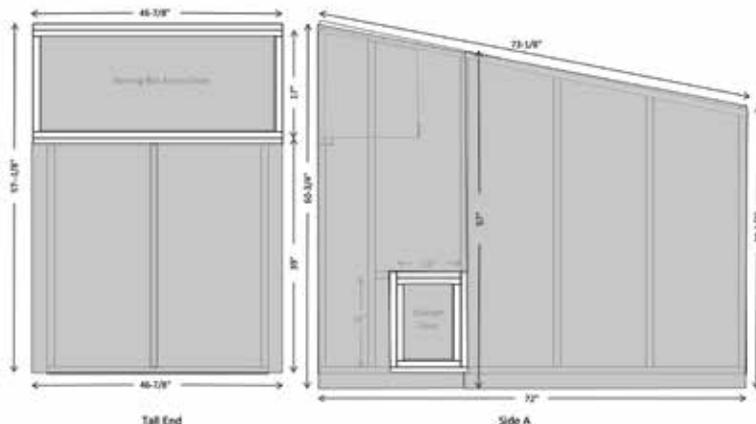
Mobile coops have a wire screen bottom that allows manure to pass through and significantly reduces the amount of cleaning required (and reduces animal health issues and potential fly problems).

A chicken tractor might be just what is needed to get started for those interested in rearing chickens.

A mobile chicken coop combined with an electrified mesh fence for a pen provides limitless free range opportunities anywhere on a property. The electrified mesh fence effectively keeps predators out and is available in a variety of lengths, heights, and mesh patterns. Shorter lengths mean smaller pen sizes that require more frequent moving to new open range.

There are a variety of chicken tractor designs and plans available from very simple to quite elaborate. You could easily design your own. Just remember, most chickens require 1.5 feet of space per bird. The design in this article is 18 square feet, will accommodate 12 birds, and will fit in the bed of a pickup. When I conduct a workshop and show participants how to build one of these structures, I normally pre-fab one side and one end and partially frame in the opposite side and end – this allows the structure to be completed in several hours while showing the steps to fully construct the project.

I hope you find it useful.





STEPS FOR CONSTRUCTING A 12-BIRD CHICKEN TRACTOR

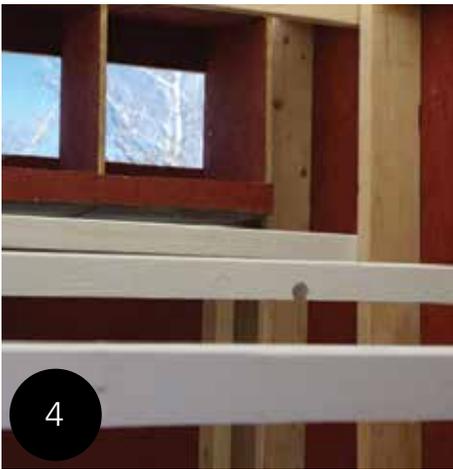


1 Build the frame for the base. Start upside down on a flat surface.

2 Turn base right side up and add the wheels. Cut to fit and attach the mesh screen to the base.



3 Complete the frames for end and side walls. Set walls in place. Attach walls to floor.



4 Attach roosts and roof support.



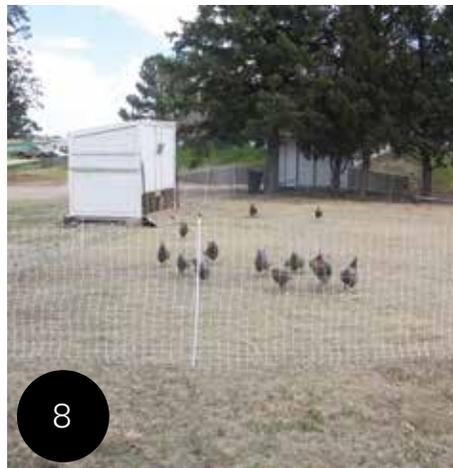
5 Attach the plywood wall to the wall frames. Complete access doors.



6 Install nesting boxes.



7 Attach roof material. Add pull rope. Set in place.



8 Set up electrified mesh fence.



9 Add food and water.



10 Check fence (is it electrified?). Add birds.

This structure will cost approximately \$500 for materials. An electric fence charger will be about \$200. The electric mesh poultry fence is also about \$200 (retailers can be located by typing "electric mesh poultry fence" into a Web browser). Other accessories, such as a feeder and waterer, will be another \$100. Visit barnyardsandbackyards.com for the complete plan and materials list.

Jeff Edwards, a University of Wyoming Extension educator, has been on a roll building chicken coops on wheels. He can be reached at (307) 837-2000 or at jedward4@uwyo.edu.