



Don't get **ZAPPED!**

Know your electric fence parts

Mae Smith

Electric fence is incredibly useful! It keeps animals like horses and chickens in and predators like coyotes and bears out.

You may have considered using electric fence but were overwhelmed by the variety of parts and gizmos. Here is a short description of essential materials so you can feel like a pro during your next hardware store trip.



What: Electric fence charger

Types: AC plug-in, battery powered or solar powered (pictured)

How: A charger is needed to electrify the fence. The type of charger needed depends on power source, length of fence, and animal contained or excluded. The power source depends on what is available – if a plug-in is close, AC is more reliable, and solar chargers may be the only option in more remote locations. Higher voltage chargers are needed for longer fences and larger animals. Wires are connected to the fence wire and ground rods driven into the ground. Make sure solar chargers are facing south and not shaded. Chargers are placed outside the fence so curious animals don't damage or disconnect something.





What: Posts

Types: Steel t-post (pictured top), fiberglass, wood, plastic step-in or ring top electric fence post

How: Posts keep the wire off the ground. The type depends on permanence, budget, number of wires, and animal contained or excluded. Wire is strung through the post (step-in and ring top) or connected to the post with an insulator (t-post, wood, and fiberglass).



What: Insulators

Types: Ceramic (corner insulator pictured), plastic

How: Insulators hold the wire to the fence without losing energy through the post. They come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Insulator type depends on post type, wire type, and location on fence.



What: Wire

Types: High tensile, aluminum or steel wire, poly tape, poly wire, poly rope or electric netting

How: Wire conducts electricity and provides the zap. Wire type depends on permanence, budget, charger type, animal contained or excluded, and purpose of fence. More visible wires may be preferable in areas with high animal density, wildlife movement, if animals are being trained, and with horses. Wire is positioned at the animal's shoulder height.



What: Other accessories

Gate handle (pictured right) to open and close fence without getting zapped



In-line strainers (pictured for high tensile) to increase tension of fence line.



Electric fence tester (pictured) is essential to make sure fence is holding a charge. Fence can be tested the old-fashioned way (find a friend to grab the wire!), but who has that many friends? Electric fence problems can result from shorting out on weeds, broken wire, not well insulated, improperly grounded, or inadequately charged.

High visibility fences or flagging tied on some of the wires help animals see the fence as they are trained. Keep an eye on the animals for the first day or so as they test the fence and learn to avoid it. There may be some repairs. Make sure the fence is functional at all times. Animals will walk through a fence they find is not working and will not respect the fence in the future.



Mae Smith does not volunteer for electric fence testing, but she does enjoy working for University of Wyoming Extension. She is the extension educator covering northwest Wyoming and can be reached at (307) 765-2868 or maep@uwyo.edu.