

Turkey Tractor

Contributed by JB
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Many people have heard of "chicken tractors"; portable pens that are used to raise meat chickens. Turkey tractors are a bit more uncommon.

Turkey tractors are very similar to chicken tractors, with several important differences. Turkey tractors need to be taller to allow room for the larger birds. The watering system should be upgraded to provide more water and allow the larger beaks of the turkeys to access the water easily. We have used this tractor for both chickens and turkeys. It is one of our older designs that is missing the split top that we are putting on all of our new chicken tractors. It is showing its age, and the effects of improvised "improvement". I plan to replace it next year.

The materials to build a chicken or turkey tractor can usually be culled from a scrap pile, yours or a neighbors. The roofing is metal roofing material left over from one of our neighbor's construction projects. The wood was scrap left over from other projects around our farm. The sides are made from left over tarps that we had laying around. The total out of pocket cost was just a few dollars for the nuts, bolts, and other hardware. In general, I don't like to use tarps on chicken tractors because they will shread over time and litter to ground with little strands of plastic tarp. On our newer design I used metal roofing for the sides. It added weight but has a longer life and there is no need to run around picking up plastic threads from all over the farm.

I like to hang both the feeder and waterer to minimize waste. To prevent the turkeys from soiling thier feed and water I raise the containers as the turkeys grow. The poultry waterer has been modified so that it will stay level when hanging. I drilled two holes in the handle of the waterer and bent a coat hanger to form a hanger. Cheap carabiners make it easy to remove the feeder and waterer for refilling.

I mounted a 2x4 using joist hangers to support the feeder and waterer. In our chicken tractors I use cup waters that are gravity fed from 5 gallon buckets; the 2x4 is just used to support a feeder.

The frame is constructed out of 8' 2x4s that have been ripped in half. This helps keep the tractor light. I nail gussets in each corner for strength. Stainless Steel nails, nuts, bolts, and washers are used as fasteners.

When the birds are large enough that they will not slip through electric net fencing we remove the wire mesh tied to the front of the tractor and let the turkeys graze inside the netting. The broad breasted turkey varieties don't fly, so the electric netting is enough to contain them.

In the next version, I am planning to: add a door to the front to replace the wire mesh, add a split top for easier access to the feeder, weather proof sides made of either metal or plastic, and improved wheels.