

Homemade Comfort Cages for Small Poultry Flocks

Homemade poultry cages can save you the time and expense of building a house for your small flock. They make it possible to place your birds in a structure that you may already have, such as a garage or shed.

Use of poultry caging puts you in complete control of your flock's diet, a factor essential to peak health and production. It also ensures that eggs produced are not lost, stolen, or soiled by litter. Additionally, the common problem of wild or stray animal attacks is eliminated. Finally, the spread of disease and soiling of footwear is reduced markedly.

Planning for a Comfort Cage

Before you begin building your comfort cage, contact your farm supply or feed store to check on the availability of finished cage units. Compare the cost of constructing a unit versus a finished cage unit.

Once you have decided to construct a cage, comparison shop to find the best-priced welded wire for your homemade cage. You can build the cage and furnish it with materials and equipment from hardware and feed stores. If you are unable to locate certain items, contact your county Extension office for more information.

Constructing a Comfort Cage

To properly construct a poultry cage, follow these steps:

Step 1. Cut cage section A of 1- by 1-inch or 1- by 2-inch galvanized welded wire (12 or

14 gauge) to the length indicated in Table 1. Dimensions provided in the table are for cages housing two or four hens. See list of required tools.

Step 2. Bend as shown in the top sketch of Figure 1. Use a hammer and edge of a 2 by 4 board to help bend the wire evenly and to square the corners. Make the 2-inch corner-bend overlap first.

Step 3. Connect one loose end to the 2-inch overlap to form the fourth corner. Use cage clips and clip pliers to make connections (Figure 2).

Step 4. Cut cage section B to the length indicated in Table 1. Bend as shown in the bottom sketch of Figure 1. Using cage clips,

Table 1. Lengths of welded wire needed

Cage dimensions for chickens^a

Cage section	Floor and top length (inches)	Side height (inches) ^b	Cage width (inches)	Total dimensions of wire sections (inches)
A (Step 1)				
Two hens	27	24	32	104 ^c x 32
Four hens	46	24	32	142 ^c x 32
B (Step 4)				
Two hens	27	24	32	84 ^d x 27
Four hens	46	24	32	84 ^d x 46

^aMeasurements can be increased to accommodate a maximum of eight laying hens. Cages can be modified for ducks and certain types of game birds. Consult your County Extension educator.

^bCage height should be increased by 6 inches if roosts are planned. A slightly roughened wood dowel or broom handle can be used for a roost. Avoid sharp edges on any surface.

^c2 (length + height) + 2 inches

^d2 x height + width + 4 inches

secure both overlaps to the cage top, all four side corners, and the double-bottom floor. Even if 1- by 2-inch wire is used, a 1- by 1-inch floor mesh pattern can be achieved. Be sure to secure the double-bottom wires at various intervals to prevent toe injuries. The assembled cage is shown in Figure 3.

Step 5. Cut a 12- by 12-inch door opening at the center of one side. Make a 14- by 14-inch wire door and hinge to the cage with standard cage clips. Make the door opening and the door larger for larger cages. This will enable the caretaker to reach all corners of the cage. *Cut all wire ends so they can be bent backward to prevent forming sharp points.* Split tubing can be slipped over the bottom edge of the door to protect the caretaker's hands and arms (Figure 4).

Step 6. To prevent crowding, improve sanitation and allow easier feeding and watering, cut appropriate openings and attach feeders and waterers to the outside of the cage. One or two 12- by 12- by 6-inch deep nesting boxes should be placed and secured inside the cage. Ordinarily, one nest box accommodates four to five hens. Use 2 to 3 inches of nesting material (straw), periodically replaced to maintain freshness and cleanliness. Nest boxes can be open at the top. A cage in use is illustrated in Figure 5.

Position the finished cage at a height from the floor that is conveniently accessible to you. Consider using a cage stand for this purpose (Figure 6). The cage also may be suspended from a ceiling by small chains or wires (Figure 5).

Use the homemade cage for family or hobby flocks (a small number of birds). This type of cage does not reflect recommended commercial stocking densities.

Tools needed:

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- Hammer
 - Side wire cutters
 - Standard cage clip pliers
 - 100 standard cage clips
 - 2 by 4 board
 - Hand or electric saw
 - Hand brace with bits or electric drill with bits
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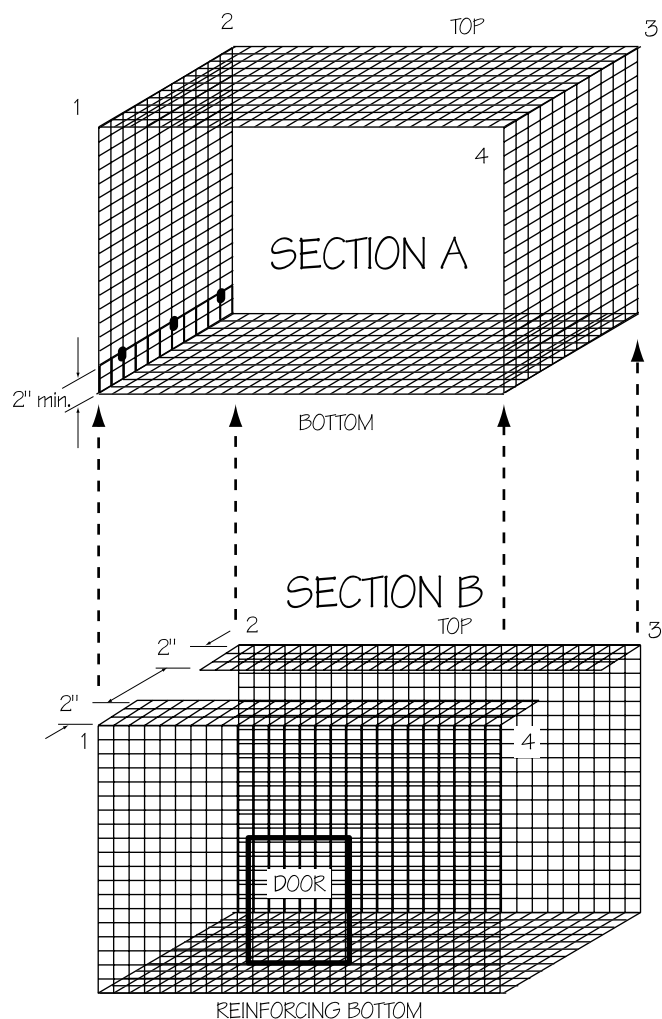


Figure 1. Cage sections. Note bends and overlaps needed to form corners. In the finished cage, corners 1, 2, 3, and 4 of section B will overlap corners 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively, of section A.

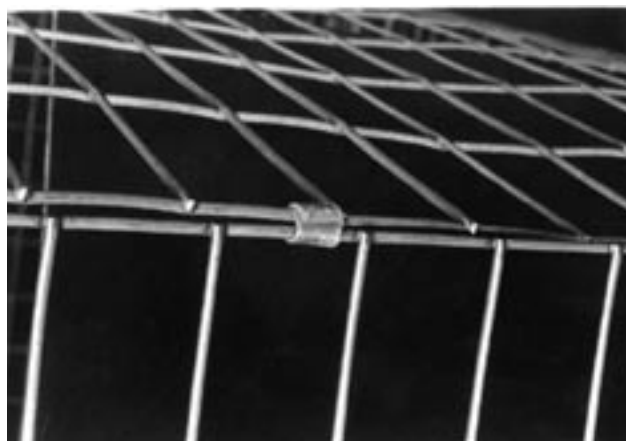


Figure 2. Cage clip securing two loose ends to form a corner.

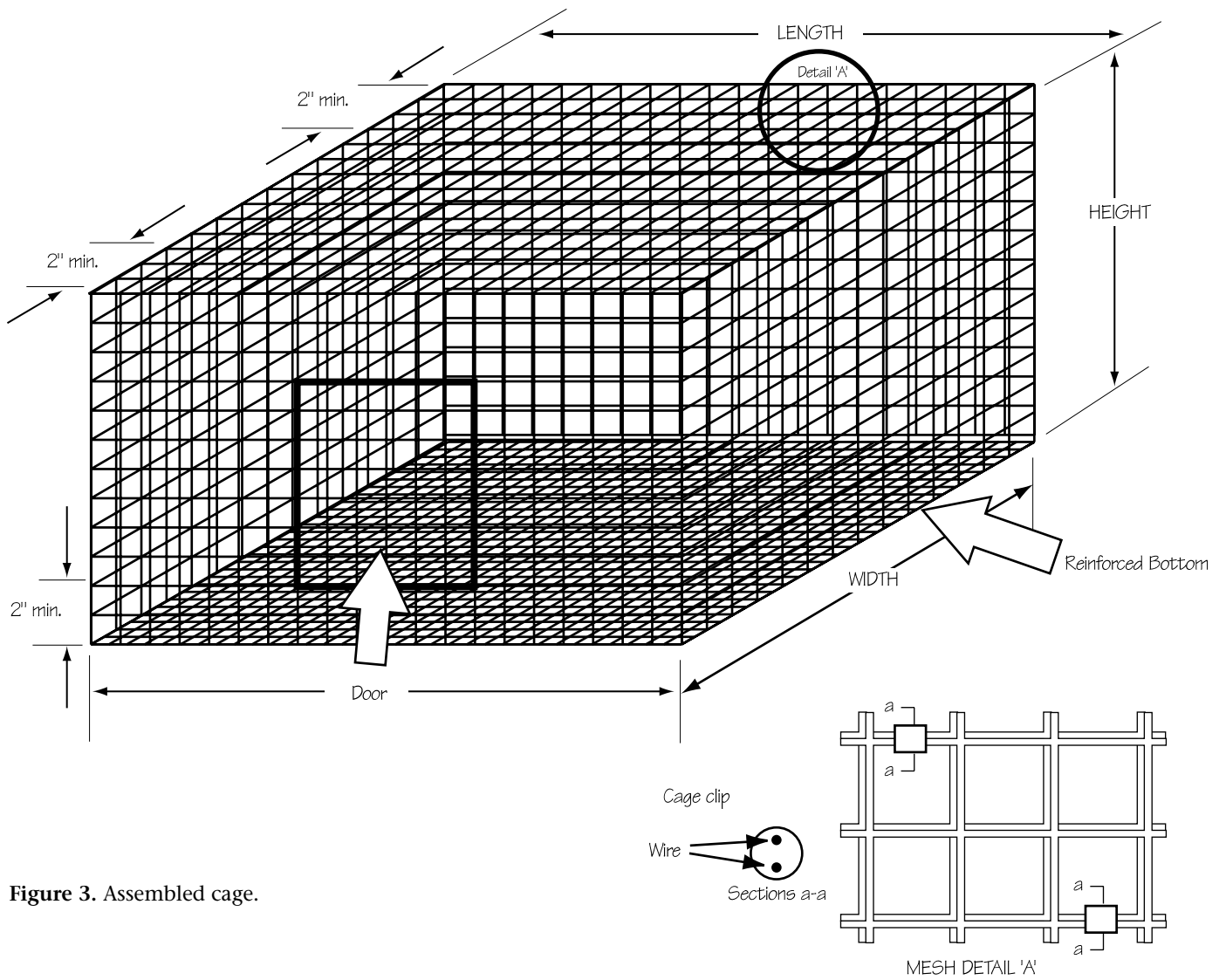


Figure 3. Assembled cage.

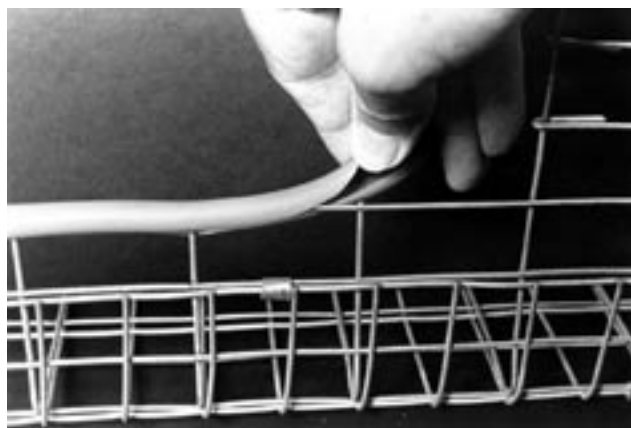


Figure 4. Split tubing used to cover sharp wire edges.



Figure 5. Suspended cage in use. Note nesting box and feed and water containers installed. (Contact Maryland Cooperative Extension for artificial lighting recommendations.)

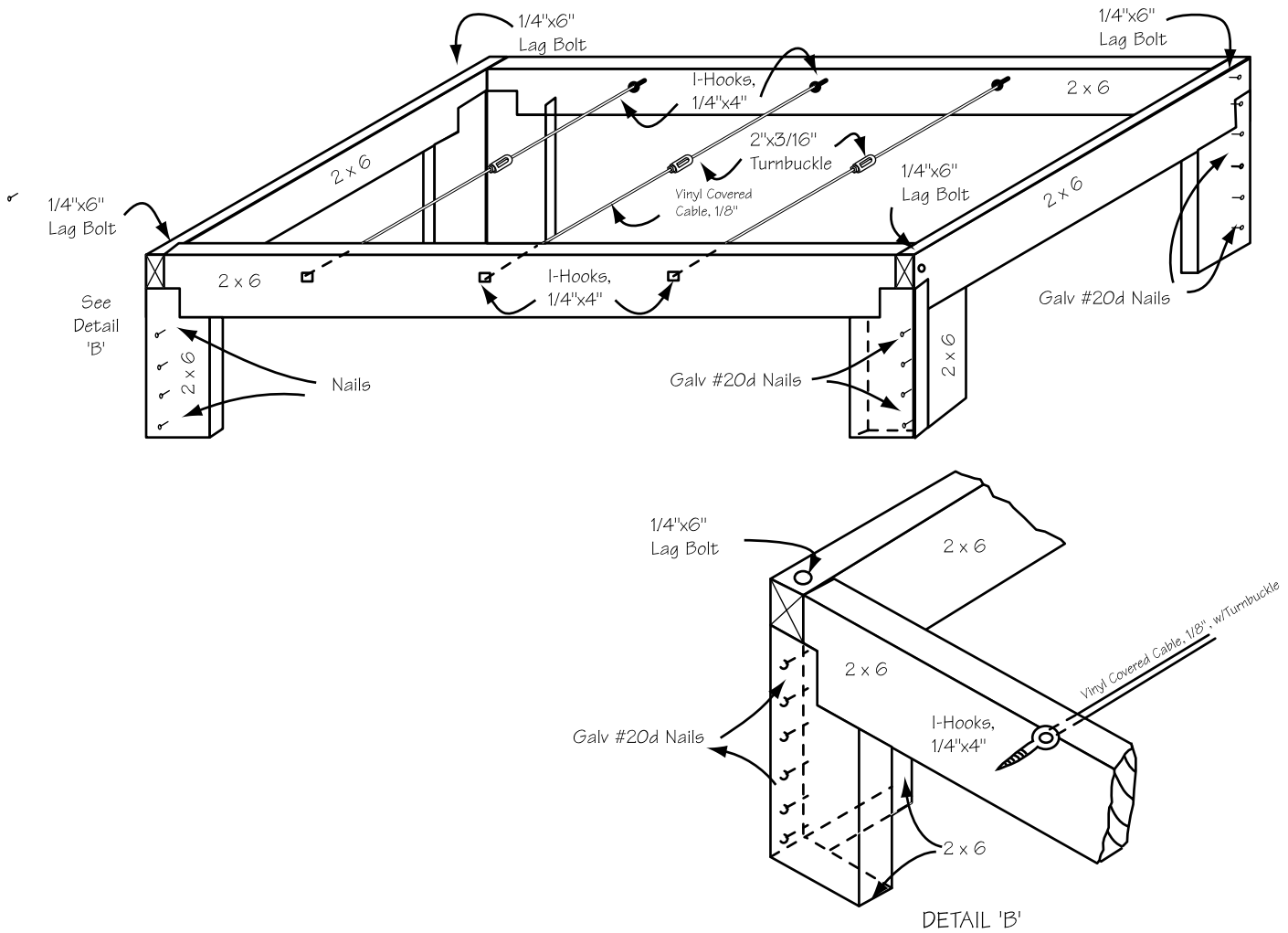


Figure 6. Cage stand concept. (Actual dimensions will be based on the size of the cage bottom constructed. Height of the stand should be adjusted according to your preference.)

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