

## Skid-Mounted Chicken Coop Easy To Move

When he couldn't find what he wanted on the market, John Houston built his own chicken coop that's easy to clean out and move around. The coop is built on a steel tube frame that can be moved by a skid loader equipped with forks.

The 4-piece mobile pen measures 12 ft. long by 6 ft. wide with a 4 by 6-ft. wood coop that's elevated about 2 ft. off the ground. The heated coop is insulated with 1 1/2-in. thick foam, is heated, and has windows and programmable lights to keep hens laying during the winter. An extension cord runs to a junction box and operates a 300-watt electric heater and the thermostat-controlled lights.

"I use a timer to keep the lights going on a 14-hour cycle. There's a thermostatically-controlled exhaust fan on the ceiling to keep the building cool during the summer," says Houston.

A pair of ramps lead up to two small doors for the chickens to get in and out of the coop. The roof is made from a rubber roofing material.

The coop walls and floor are lined with 1/8-in. thick, grooved fiberglass tileboard, and the seams are caulked, making the inside of the coop water resistant. "The tileboard has a slick surface for easy sweeping and washing. I can hose it down quickly to clean," says Houston.

The coop floor is hinged on both sides, allowing Houston to drop down both sides while the chickens are in the pen area for



Home-built chicken coop is built on a steel tube frame. "When I want to move the unit I lock the chickens in the coop and then use my Bobcat to pick it up," says inventor John Houston.

easy clean-out. "A 2 by 3-ft. screen closes up on the bottom so I can put litter in there. To change the litter I open up and dump the wood shavings on the ground."

To move the unit he simply inserts the skid loader's forks into slots in the tubular frame.

The unit is built heavy, with 2 by 4's on edge held together with 7-in. screws. Yet it's

fairly lightweight, says Houston. "Whenever I want to move the unit I lock the chickens in the coop and then use my Bobcat to pick it up. Once I'm at the new site I open up the access hatches to the coop to let the chickens come down into the pen. I didn't like the wheeled chicken coops on the market because they have small wheels and are built flimsy and

look like they'll fall apart after a while.

"I spent about \$1,600 to build it, which was more than I had planned on spending. But I wanted it to look nice and last a long time."

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Pat Spillers turned a ripped-up trampoline into this mobile chicken pen. Roosting box detaches and moves separately, while the nesting box is screwed to trampoline frame.



He left the best half of the trampoline's tarp in place for shade and covered the other half with 1-in. chicken wire.

## Trampolines Make Nifty Mobile Chicken Pens

"I had a ripped-up trampoline and needed a chicken coop I could move around. It just worked out," says Pat Spillers about the chicken "tractor" design he came up with.

It turned out so well he made a second one with a few upgrades to make it completely self-contained. His 20 hens can scratch in new grass every day, help themselves to feed in the feeder, lay eggs in one of six nesting boxes, and climb into a roosting box at night.

Spillers recommends using heavy-duty wheels. The small steel wheels he first used

didn't roll very well when the ground was soft. Four 6-in. castor wheels attached to the bottom of the trampoline frame work real well, he says.

He left the best half of the trampoline's tarp on for shade and covered the other half with 1-in. chicken wire. He also attached chicken wire around the sides with plastic zip ties, leaving openings for a nesting box made of 1-in. sq. tubing and 1/2-in. plywood and for the entrance to the roosting box.

The roosting box detaches and moves

separately, Spillers says. But the nesting box is screwed to the trampoline frame. It has sheet metal over the top for extra shade and a top lid for easy access to the nests to gather eggs, clean and add pine chips. He also has a lid on the roosting box so he can hose it out and fill the feeder.

To deter pets and predators, Spillers ran solar-powered hot tape around the bottom. Though it can get windy in Elk City, Okla., cement blocks next to the wheels are enough to hold the coop in place.

"My biggest concern is having fresh grass for the chickens, so I move it every day," he says.

The chickens have improved the lawn, killing weeds and contributing fertilizer.

"I don't have to mow," Spillers says. "They are an earth-friendly lawn mower, and you get some eggs out of the deal too."

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## Drain Tile Saves Garden Plants From Cutworms

Mike Toppen of Burnips, Mich., got tired of watching cutworms destroy vegetable seedlings in his garden year after year. He didn't want to use harsh pesticides, so he came up with a low-cost solution that makes use of common drain tile.

"I bought a 100-ft. length of 3-in. dia. corrugated black plastic drain tile and used a bandsaw to cut it into 4-in. sections, which I place around each plant in my garden," says

Toppen. "The tile forms a physical barrier that blocks cutworms from reaching the plants. I've used this idea for the past 5 years on my tomatoes, peppers, cabbages, broccoli, and so forth. It really works well - I hardly lost any plants this year at all. Before I tried this idea, I often had to replant 2 to 3 times to get a good stand. Once the plants 'outgrow' the drain tile, I remove the tile and store it for the next year."

Another benefit is the plants are easier to water. "I push soil up around the outside of the tile to form a berm that keeps water from leaking out under the tile. That way I can go down the rows using a sprinkler can to water just the plants and not the weeds between the rows," notes Toppen.

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Corrugated black plastic drain tile forms a physical barrier that blocks cutworms from reaching plants.