



To kill rabbits, Howerton slides neck into "wringer" and pulls up quickly on back legs in one swift motion. Rabbit hanger (right) holds rear feet for skinning.

By Klaire Howerton

Pastured Rabbits Butchered With Farm-Built Gadgets

My husband, Caleb Howerton of Norwood, Mo., decided recently to start raising rabbits to offset his family's meat costs and to provide future income. His meat rabbit breed of choice was Broken New Zealand Reds. "I chose Broken New Zealand Reds over a solid colored meat breed because the red and white markings make it easier to tell potential breeders apart from the rest," Caleb said. "Plus, New Zealand rabbits in general have one of the best meat to bone ratios of any meat breed."

Instead of raising rabbits conventionally in cages, Caleb decided to put them on pasture in portable pens like poultry. The pens have

wire mesh floors so they can't tunnel out and can be moved each day to fresh grass. The 4 by 8-ft. "rabbit tractor" is built from 2 by 6 boards, a cattle panel, 2 by 4 welded wire, a sheet of tin and chicken wire. An 8-ft. sheet of tin was used to create a roof for shade and weather protection. Lastly, some small boards, hinges and extra wire were used to fashion a door, and large eye screws were attached to the front of the frame along with a rope for ease of pulling.

After 12 weeks on pasture, the fryer rabbits are processed with the help of some tools created from some odds and ends found around the farm. A "rabbit wringer" is used

to dislocate the spinal cord of the rabbit when processing. Rabbits are butchered by first breaking the neck of the animal. A wringer must be sturdy enough to get the job done quickly and efficiently. Howerton's rabbit wringer is made from 1 1/2-in. angle iron and a short piece of rebar. Using a cutting torch, the rebar was heated and bent into a notch shape that would fit the rabbit's head, and then welded to the angle iron. Two holes were drilled into the angle iron so that the wringer could be screwed to a sturdy board or post. Once the metal cooled, the wringer was spray painted black to prevent rust.

Once the rabbit is ready to be dressed, a

rabbit hanger is used to hang the rabbit by the feet so that it can easily be skinned and cleaned. Caleb built his hangers using 1 1/2-in. angle iron, and long bolts. Two bolts were used for each hanger—just like with the wringer, the bolts were heated with a cutting torch, and each one was bent into a V shape before being welded onto the angle iron. Holes in the angle iron allow the hanger to be attached wherever it's needed. The rabbit hanger was also spray painted black to keep the tool from rusting.

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He Uses Steel Posts To Repair Split Rail Fences

Steel fence posts work great to repair split rail fence posts that have rotted off at ground level or slightly below, says Loran Bauer.

He cuts 6 or 8-ft. posts in half to make 2 posts out of them, then drills 3 holes spaced 5 to 6 in. apart into the top part of each. He drives each steel post into the ground next to a rotted-off post and then uses 4-in. coated deck screws to hold them in place.

"It's the easiest, cheapest, and quickest solution I've found to give split rail fence posts many more years of life," says Bauer. "Put the steel posts on back of the cedar post and you won't notice them from your house or yard. But even if you put the steel posts in front, they're hardly noticeable from a distance."

"All you need is 12 to 18 in. of steel post above ground and 18 to 24 in. of post under ground. The rusty color of old steel posts matches nicely with the look of old cedar posts."

Bauer says he came up with the idea after some of the posts in his split-rail fence started rotting off. "I put the fence in some 30 years ago, and after it weathered for a couple years it really looked great. However, after about 7 to 10 years some posts began to weaken."

"At first I replaced several posts with new ones, but it was expensive and a pain to dig out the old post. It seemed like I was replacing 1 or 2 posts every couple of years, and because the new posts weren't weathered they looked odd for a year or two. Now more than half the posts in my fence are patched this way, and I think the entire fence will probably last another 30 years."

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Loran Bauer uses steel posts to repair his split rail fence. He drives the post into the ground next to a weakened upright and then screws it in place.

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