

Cement Pad Makes Poles Easy To Set

“My homemade cement pads let me set posts without having to mix concrete, and without having to guess at the depth of the footing. I don’t have to handle 50-lb. bags of concrete or move a wheelbarrow full of concrete from hole to hole when putting up a pole-type building,” says David Colby of Fairlee, Vt.

The octagon-shaped pads measure 17 in. wide by 5 1/2 in. high and are designed to be used at the same time the holes are dug. Each pad weighs about 95 lbs. and is lifted with a metal handle, which consists of a length of pipe with a metal hook attached to each end. The hooks slip under a pair of light wire loops embedded in the concrete.

Colby uses forms made from 2 by 6’s to make the pads, cutting 8 short boards with angled ends and then screwing them together. He brushes motor oil around the interior of the form to keep the concrete from sticking to it. When pouring the concrete, he pushes a cross made out of 1/2-in. rebar down into the middle of the form to make the pad stronger.

“The handle makes the pad easy to pick up and move around,” says Colby. “When I’m ready to lower the pad into the hole I set the form at the edge of the hole, detach the handle’s hooks from the wire loops, and drop the pad into the hole.

“The hardest part is making sure the pad is level. A lot of times we overdig the hole so someone can get down in it and use a level. Most of the holes we dig are 4 to 5 ft. deep.”

It’s a simple idea, but Colby says it works great. “I’ve been constructing pole buildings since 1973 and have tried all kinds of ways to set posts, but this idea is the best yet. A lot of times when you dig a hole it’ll cave in some, so when you pour concrete into the bottom you don’t always know how much you’ve poured. With my pads I always know the exact depth of the footing.”

Before pouring concrete into the form, Colby sets it on a piece of plywood to make sure the bottom of the pad is always flat. “I don’t make the pads any deeper than 5 1/2



Octagon-shaped cement pad is lifted with a detachable metal handle. Colby uses 2 by 6 forms (right) to make the pads, which serve as footing for poles.

in. because 95 lbs. is about as much as one person can lift,” he notes.

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No Freeze With Winter Waterer

Steve Kenyon gets freeze-free winter water for his cow herd by placing a submersible pump in a nearby pond. He controls shutoff and ensures drained waterlines by limiting fuel in a portable generator that powers the pump.

“I fill the generator tank half full so when it runs out, the pump stops and any water in the line drains back into the pond,” says Kenyon.

The simple system is aided by the steep slope between the stock tank in the nearby pasture and the pond with the pump. Kenyon mounts the end of the water line above one end of the tank. At the pond, the water line is insulated at water level by a pack of straw bales.

Two strands of hot wire and a ground between the end of the water line and the cattle keep them from interfering with the hose. Having the electric fence over the tank

also keeps his cattle trained to electric fences. While he has trained his cattle to eat snow, he prefers them having access to water.

“In the winter, snow acts as an insulator, and a single cross wire doesn’t zap the cows like it does in the summer,” explains Kenyon. “As they push and shove around a water tank, they touch both hot wires and the ground, and it zaps them, reminding them to not touch the flimsy cross wire.”

When they are in winter grazing areas without a water tank, Kenyon sets hay bales across a two or three wire perimeter fence as a training aid. “The cows will get zapped when trying to reach them,” says Kenyon. “It keeps them trained.”

These concepts are among those he has developed for his farm-based business. He does custom grazing and feeding and direct-markets grass-fed meat to consumers. He



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also teaches intensive grazing techniques and mentors other farmers and ranchers in grazing and other elements of sustainable agriculture.

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“Miniature” Cattle Dogs Gaining In Popularity

“Miniature heeler cattle dogs have an advantage over larger cattle dogs in several ways,” says Cheer Webber of Prineville, Oregon. Webber has been raising old-style Australian cattle dogs since the 1960’s.

“My first mini heeler was a super dog; I was about 12 or 13 years old when I got her and she worked every part of the cattle operation – trail drives, sorting, loading into trucks. She was light so her feet held up better than a heavy dog when we were on trail drives just poking along behind cattle. She could jump to the back of my horse and ride on the back of my saddle and rest a spell, while the large dogs couldn’t do that as well.

“When working the chutes for doctoring and loading, she could stick her head under the bottom board on the chute and bite a heel and push cattle up the chute. The big dogs couldn’t do that because they couldn’t get through the gaps in boards.”

Ranchway miniature heeler dogs are descendants of original Australian heeler dogs brought into the U.S. by Dr. Jack Woolsey, a California veterinarian and dog breeder. “When I started breeding dogs, I looked around for anyone who had the true heeler dogs that actually came down from the Woolsey blood lines,” Webber says. “It’s not easy to find unrelated stock to cross to, but we have several different bloodlines here, and we are able to cross back and forth to keep a wide gene pool. I’m always looking for new stock that’s suitable.”



Miniature heeler cattle dogs offer several advantages over larger cattle dogs, says Cheer Webber.

Webber says standard heeler dogs are 17 to 20 in. tall and weigh 30 to 50 lbs. “If they’re less than 16 in. tall and weigh less than 30 lbs., we consider them miniature.”

Miniature heelers are good companion dogs, according to Webber, and do well in herding classes, agility, and most anything active. “They do well herding sheep, goats and poultry. They’re also popular with people who have had larger heelers and love the breed, but can no longer have a large dog.”

The North American Purebred Registry added a separate category for miniatures in 2008, Webber says, and the American Stock Dog Registry now recognizes miniatures.

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Car Headlights Used To Light Cattle Shed

Walk into one end of K.D. Cook’s custom built cattle shed when the lights are on and you might think you’re face-to-face with a half dozen cars. That’s because Cook used a dozen old car headlights to illuminate the inside of his building. They all mount at one end of the shed facing the other end.

“I decided to use old sealed beam car headlights in the shed rather than mercury vapor because they’re instant-on and they’d throw out plenty of light when I was working the cattle,” says Cook. “I bought them for a buck or two, so the price was right. Then I went to an auto store and bought plugs so I could wire them in sequence.”

Cook mounted each headlight to a metal roof truss on a piece of 18-in. long angle iron. Each headlight is held inside a plastic flower pot with a small metal bracket so it faces out instead of down. Initially he wired all of the lights in sequence to one switch and connected it through a 20-amp fuse, but that wasn’t large enough. “Whenever I flipped the switch, the fuse blew, so I went to Plan B,” says Cook.

He tried powering the lights through transformers from old welders, but they put out too much power. What did work was running power through a 200-amp battery charger with 10 amp, 30 amp and 40 amp

output settings. With the dial on 40 amps it runs all the lights. He uses 3 switches to turn the ones he needs on and off. Better yet, if the utility power is out, Cook says he can hook up the charger’s battery cables to his tractor and still have lights in his shed.

Another unique feature of Cook’s shed is the 5-ft. tall inner wall made of metal roadside guardrails. Three horizontal metal rails are welded to the vertical metal upright posts with a small space between. Cook says the smooth rail surface provides a nice protective wall for the cattle and keeps them from pushing out metal side panels.

His 80-acre hillside farm has 60 acres of pasture divided into 17 paddocks of 3 to 6 acres each. He grazes 60 to 80 beef cattle about two thirds of the year. He waters the cattle using a 3,000-gal. reservoir he built on the hillside, 150 ft. above the well-head. Gravity flow feeds water troughs that serve the paddocks. He uses the shed to work the cattle as needed and for loadout when they’re ready for market.

“My acreage was part of our family farm, and I’m proud to have it set up with rotational grazing and a nice building I put up myself to work the cattle,” says Cook.

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