Delta Web Poll

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Build Your Own Duck Factory

How to Build, Install and Maintain a Hen House

Part One: Delta's Kevin Ward and Jim Fisher show you how to build a Henhouse

Part Two: Jim Fisher shows you how to install a Hen House

Part Three: The importance of taking care of your Hen House prior to the breeding season

Rollover for controls - press play to start videos

Looking for a fun winter project that you and your kids can build together, will bring enjoyment all summer and help out your local duck population? Constructing a Hen House is just the ticket. No, this is not a fancy chicken house. It is an artificial nesting structure for wild mallard ducks.

Sometimes called □Mallard Factories□, these easy to build and install structures give mallard hens a safe place to lay their eggs in the spring, away from increasing numbers of prairie predators such as raccoons and skunks. Research has shown that on average, a hen mallard will have a successful nest about 80% of the time in a Hen House, whereas nests on the ground may have only a 0-20% chance of surviving.

Hen Houses can be installed at any time of the year, but the easiest time to put them in is winter

when you can walk or snowmobile safely out on the ice (6-8□ thick). Of course, those of you in the far south won□t have the luxury of ice, so we suggest going out in a stable boat or using waders to install your Hen House. Hen Houses should be placed in small wetlands 0.5 to 3 acres in size about 3 □ 5 feet from emergent vegetation (e.g. bulrush and cattails). You want to avoid lakes, rivers and large wetlands as ice movement or fast moving debris can bend or dislodge the Hen House base. Keep in mind you want to install your Hen House so it sits at least 3 feet above the water to help stop mink and raccoons from dining on the eggs. However, to be able to easily maintain the Hen House, you won□t want it to be more then 5 feet above the water. Of course water levels will vary from year to year, so you will have to make a □best guess□ at the height when you put it in. It is better to err on the high side then to find your Hen House underwater in the spring. Finally, place the tunnel so that the opening is perpendicular to the prevailing winds □ this will prevent the nesting material from blowing out.

To ensure mallard hens will want to use your Hen House every year, a small amount of maintenance will be required. Check your Hen House in late winter, while the ice is still thick enough to walk on, or for more southern climates, before hens start to nest. Stuff new flax straw (can substitute timothy grass, bermuda hay) into the canopy if it is sparse (a piece of lathe works well for this). Add nesting material so it covers the entire bottom half of the tunnel. You want to use a soft material such as brome hay and make sure you don□t block the tunnel entrance.

Instructions:

Materials (see above picture):

1) flax straw (can substitute timothy grass, bermuda hay) for roll)

2) grass hay for nesting material

3) 8 foot long base pipe (1.5" diameter)

4) 30 inch long insert piece (1" diameter tubing)

5) 18 inch long support piece (1" diameter tubing)

6) 7' by 3' long wire mesh (with either 2"by 1" or 1" by 1" grid and 16 gauge wire) - this is the one piece double rolled that forms the Hen House itself

7) two 1/4 inch rods, 20 inches in length - bent for cradling roll

8) 12 hog rings, one bolt or clip to adjust height

Total cost should be roughly $40 for materials.

Steps for assembly:

1) Weld the two smaller diameter pipes (1" square tubing) together to make a T. The longer (30") one has two holes through it for height adjustment. This 'insert' piece slides into the larger diameter 8 foot pipe once it has been pounded into the bottom of the wetland.

2) Weld two 1/4 bent rods on to the shorter pipe (18") at each end to form a cradle for the roll

3) Roll up three feet of the 7' by 3' wire mesh (see picture) and hog ring in 3-4 places to hold inner ring of roll.

4) Spread approximately 2" of flax straw (or equivalent) on remaining 4' of roll and continue roll and hog ring. This gives you a three foot long roll that is 11 to 12 inches in diameter. Be careful not to exceed 12" as Canada Geese may use them if they are wider.

Steps for installation:

1) Pound base pipe into wetland.

2) Slide insert pipe into base pipe.

3) Adjust height of Hen House so bottom is at least 3 feet above water.

4) Attach roll to cradle with hog rings or wire (plastic tie straps will eventually break so are not recommended).

5) Adjust grass inside Hen House so that it is 2/3rds full.

6) Record gps location (if available).

Steps for maintenance:

1) Revisit every year a month or two prior to the onset of the nesting season, in good ice conditions.

2) Check for and record use from previous year, look for nest bowl, feathers, down, eggs shell fragments, whole eggs, egg membranes.

3) Replace flax straw in roll (hens often remove straw and add to their nest bowl).

4) Add new grass to inside of roll, refilling to 2/3rds full.

If you have any questions, or want more information on how you can help the ducks, phone toll-free 1-877-667-5656 (Canada), 1-888-987-3695 (USA).

To support our Hen House program:

U.S. Citizens : Call toll-free 1-888-987-3695 (8am - 5pm Mon-Fri) or donate online by clicking here.

Canadian Citizens : Call toll-free 1-877-667-5656 (8am - 5pm Mon-Fri) or donate via our secure server by clicking here.
