

How to build a turtle nest cage

Four of Wisconsin's 11 turtles are endangered, threatened or have declining populations, and keeping turtle eggs and hatchlings safe is important to keep them from vanishing from Wisconsin.

If you find a turtle nesting on your property, leave the nest where it is and protect it from predators by putting a "nest cage" over it.

Using a few supplies and following some easy steps, you can build a nest cage with an open bottom that protects turtle eggs and hatchlings from raccoons and other predators while letting young turtles crawl out after they've hatched.



Supplies

Roll of mesh wire fencing with 1 in. x 2 in. or 3 in. mesh

Package of wire cage clips

Wire cutter or needle nose pliers

4 stakes (forestry, tent stakes, etc.)

Galvanized wire, twine, or some other sturdy line

Hammer

Hand held garden spade



Directions

Cut.

Use wire cutter to cut 1 top piece and four side pieces from your roll of wire mesh fencing.

Dimensions for top piece: 12 in. x 12 in.

Dimensions for 4 side pieces: 7 in. (h) x 12 in. (w)

Assemble.

Use wire cutter or needle nose pliers to attach each side cage piece to the top.

Use 3 evenly spaced clips per side.



Place the cage and stake it down.

Use hammer claw or spade to outline where cage will go and dig down about 4 inches.

Place completed nest cage over nest and bury lower half in soil.

Pack sand or soil around sides of cage.

Stake down cage to prevent raccoons and other predators from trying to pull up nest cage.

The openings will allow nest to get necessary sun exposure and will be large enough that the hatchlings can crawl out.

Wisconsin DNR Natural Heritage Conservation Program
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When to look for turtle nests

All of Wisconsin's 11 turtles nest every year in late spring through early summer (nesting can begin as early as May 20 and often extends through July 7).

Turtle nests may be found in a variety of locations where sandy and/or well-drained soil is exposed to sun for most of the day, including sand banks along rivers and lakes, gardens, gravel driveways and road shoulders.

Some turtle species nest within a few feet of open water, while others travel up to 1,000 feet or more away from open water to nest.

Depending on the species and weather conditions, turtles may begin to hatch in as little as 2 months, although 3-4 months is more common. Some species, such as the painted turtle, may overwinter in their nests and not emerge until the following spring.

After a successful hatch, there is often a small hole where the hatchlings emerged from their nest.



When & how long to keep a nest cage in place

Predation of a turtle nest can occur at any time so ideally the nest cage would be installed immediately, within minutes of the female leaving the area, and kept up through the fall or spring.

However, if the cage is along a gravel drive way or other area where you cannot leave it installed for an extended period of time, leave the cage in place for at least 1-2 weeks.