



6 Fence and Gate Repair Tips

Sometimes the farm fence or gate needs repair. Here are six cost-effective (and easy) fixes for fences and gates on the farm.

By Heather Smith Thomas

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Tips for Tightening and Splicing

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Farm Fencing Basics Keeping fences and gates in good repair is an important part of maintaining a farm, whether large or small.

Good fences help keep livestock safely housed: A sagging fence or gate, broken wires, and downed or loose poles may tempt animals to make a break for it—out on a busy road or into hostile territory—possibly injuring or killing themselves in the process.

Here are a few simple and inexpensive tips to help make fence and gate repair easier.

Tightening Wire with a Hammer

When mending a wire fence—such as tightening sagging wires or splicing broken wires back together—a fence stretcher is nice, but a simple carpenter's hammer will also do the job. To repair a fence with broken wire, you may need to add extra wire—a short piece (one to two feet long) of smooth wire—to make your splicing task easier. The additional material gives you enough wire to loop the ends of the broken section and make a “hammer roll” to pull it tight.

Tips for Tightening and Splicing Make a loop in one end of the wire and pull the other end through it.

Anchor the loose end between the hammer's claw.

Twist the hammer so the wire wraps around it.

Keep twisting until the wire is as tight as you want it.

Untwist the hammer, leaving the wire still tight where it bends.

Take the hammer off the wire, leaving the tight crimp to hold the wire tight.

Finish the splice by wrapping the end of the wire tightly around itself.

Top To start the splice, make a loop in one end of the broken wire and run an additional piece of material through the loop.

Place the hammer against the wire and anchor the loose end between the hammer claw. Then roll the wire around the hammer, making as many twists as necessary to get the wire very tight.

Once the wire is taut, untwist the hammer, leaving the wire tight where it bends. Then you can go ahead and twist the remainder of the loose ends, finishing your splice. Using the hammer this way, you can pull the wire much tighter than you can by hand, making the bend in the wire tight enough to hold until you can finish it off by wrapping it around itself.

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Chicken Wire to Protect Wood Fences

If you have horses, you'll find they like to chew on posts and poles, especially if they are confined in a small area. Horses that grow up in big pastures don't develop the wood-chewing habit as readily, but if they are kept in small pastures or pens without enough room to roam or grass to graze, they almost always chew wood. Some horses will ruin a good fence in a short time, eating clear through posts or poles.

However, wooden fences are usually safer for horses than barbed wire, metal posts and other types of unforgiving fence material, but they must be protected from chewing or they won't last long. Wood preservatives and foul-tasting applications



used by many horse owners to protect fences will deter some chewers, but not all. Some horses will chew wood regardless of how hard you try to discourage them. In addition to being poor deterrents, some “anti-chew” remedies are toxic—old motor oil, for instance, contains lead which is highly poisonous.

One way to keep horses away from wood fencing is to use an electric wire in conjunction with the fencing—the “hot” wire is installed inside the fence line, adequately spaced, so that horses can’t reach the wood without first getting a “zap.” This works well in pastures or large pens, but is often not advisable in a small area where horses (or people) may inadvertently bump into the hot wire—or be forced into it by overly playful or aggressive animals.

A better way to protect wood fences that enclose a pen or corral is to cover the wood with small-mesh chicken wire. To do this, use tin snips to cut the chicken wire into strips sized to completely cover the exposed portions of the wood. Posts, poles or boards in a pen or paddock can be protected this way because a horse cannot, or will not chew through the chicken wire.

The chicken wire can be stapled to a post or pole at frequent intervals so there are no loose patches or sharp protrusions—just a smooth surface that the horse can’t grab hold of. It takes quite a few staples to secure the wire properly to ensure that there are no loose edges or pieces of wire sticking out that might otherwise attract curious horses. To avoid injuries, all cut edges should be carefully tucked. Use staples that are large enough to hold securely and not pull out. Wood covered with small-mesh chicken wire is not accessible for chewing, and it is not pleasant (abrasive on the teeth) so horses tend to leave it alone. To help maintain your fencing, a non-toxic wood preservative, such as log oil, can be applied to the posts and poles periodically with a brush, even after the chicken wire is installed.

Chicken wire is inexpensive and a roll will cover a lot of fence. But your installation time will be a factor. However, when you weigh these costs against replacing poles, boards and posts—or rebuilding corrals and pens—you’ll find that chicken wire is a thrifty way to prolong the life of your wooden fences.

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Fixing a Sagging Gate

A wooden or metal gate can become a heavy burden to open and close if it begins to sag and drag on the ground. Gate posts should be sturdy and set deep to avoid sagging. But unless the posts are set in concrete, even well-constructed gates can drag because posts can “give” over time. In some areas, the ground is unstable and won’t hold a post well, especially for a heavy gate. For example, frost can push posts upward, making them less secure. Occasionally a simple pole panel is used as a gate in an opening that does not have a sturdy post for hanging a proper gate. Having to lift or drag the panel to open and shut can be a back-breaking chore. These problems can be solved, however, by putting a small wheel underneath the moving end of a panel or sagging gate. The wheel takes all the weight and supports a gate or panel to prevent further sagging and enables easy opening and closing.

Just about any type of small wheel will work for this purpose. On our gates we have used old wheelbarrow tires and small metal wheels—the kind you sometimes find in old junk piles or salvage from a piece of ancient farm equipment. A wheelbarrow tire can be easily adapted by bolting the uprights (or even just one of them—the piece of metal that comes down either side of the tire to hold its small axle) to a wooden or pole gate.

An old wheel or tire with any kind of long axle attached to it can also be securely wired to a metal gate by fastening the axle to the bottom rail or pipe. If you use stiff, strong wire and secure each end of the axle (close to the wheel and at the opposite end), the wheel will stay solidly in place and the weight of the gate will not alter the angle of the wheel much, if at all. You want it securely attached so the wheel or tire will stay upright, with no wobble. Then it will roll freely and easily on the ground, taking the weight of the gate without binding or catching.

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Easy Fix for a Gate Latch

Metal gates are handy in pens and pastures, and some of these have latches that work with a handle that is pulled or pushed. Typically, the latch is a metal prong that inserts into a hole in an adjacent post when the gate is shut; to open this type of gate, the latch is usually pulled to release from the post. These latches work fine if the posts are solid and never move. Sometimes, however, posts can shift over time, and latches no longer reach them.

A simple way to fix this without having to reset posts or rehang gates is to securely nail two small poles or boards on both sides of the latch hole on a gate post. Then the metal latch (when shut) will insert between the two poles or boards and “catch” to hold the gate closed.



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Electric Fence Gate Crossing

If you use electric fencing around horse or livestock pens and pastures, you'll generally have an insulated handle on every gate so you can open and close without getting zapped. On frequently used gates, you may find it easier to install a tall pole on each side of the gate, so you can route the electric wire up over the gate, high enough that people, animals and large machinery will not touch the hot wire.

However, if you do use insulated gate handles, always situate the handle on the end toward the fence charger, so that the gate "wire" will have no electricity because it's disconnected from the charger when the handle is undone and the gate is open. This way if the hot wire gets looped over the wooden or metal gate, or thrown on the ground while open, it won't shock anyone or short out and possibly start a fire in dry grass or weeds.

If the hot wire is spanning a metal gate, the wire may become a nuisance at times if it happens to touch the metal while the gate is closed and short out the electric fence—or electrify the gate and shock anyone who touches or tries to open it. It can be tricky to open and shut a metal gate if you forget to unhook the electric handle. Even if the electric wire and its insulated handle are a few inches away from the metal gate, the wind may sometimes cause the wire to touch the gate.

A good way to eliminate any chance of having the hot wire touch the gate is to put that segment of wire through an old garden hose. Cut the hose to match the length of the metal gate—with a couple inches to spare on each end so there's never any danger of the wire touching the gate. The rubber or plastic hose will adequately insulate the wire where it travels along the gate, to prevent any shorts or shocks.

If the wire you use for the gate portion is somewhat stiff, it's not difficult to gently push it through the length of hose, and then attach the electric fence handle to the end of it.

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Easy-close Gate Idea

Occasionally a gate may be made of wire rather than metal or wood. Wire gates (made of netting, or six to eight strands of wire, with "stays" to keep the wire properly spaced) can sometimes become difficult to close, especially if they are tight gates that livestock can't get through. One way to make such a gate easier to close is to put a handle on the gate post to give you more leverage for pulling it shut.

A metal handle with a wire loop attached can be securely fastened to the top of the gate post by means of a flat platform that is bolted onto the post. The handle, when open, with the wire loop attached, gives you an extra 12 to 18 inches of reach for shutting the gate, eliminating the struggle to get the end of the gate into the wire loop.

Then when the gate end (small upright post) is put into the loop, you can use the handle for leverage, pushing it up and over, which automatically tightens the gate and brings it up snug to the post. When it's closed, and the metal handle is folded back over the top of the gate post, it can be secured with a pin in a raised metal tab to keep the handle from ever popping up or opening accidentally due to cows and horses scratching against it.

For a barnyard or pasture gate that needs to be nice and tight, yet still easy to open and close, this arrangement works very well, especially for those of us who don't have long, strong arms for getting the gate shut.

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