

FENCING GRASSLANDS



Photo 1 & 2. When using high tensile fencing it is important to use sturdy poles to support the wires. Plastic poles can be used to separate the wires.



Photo 3 & 4. A stile or closing gate is a good way to make the grassland more accessible for visitors.

Since prehistoric time farmers have used fences to prevent livestock from destroying meadows and arable fields. Wooden fences have been used during centuries, in later time together with stone walls. Later these materials have been replaced by barbed wire and nowadays by electric fencing and sheep netting. Today fences are used to keep livestock in special grazing areas.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FENCING

Barbed wire, metal wires with spines, has often been used for fencing during the past 50 years or more. The advantage with barbed wire is that it is inexpensive, but the disadvantages are many. It wounds both cattle and wild animals and is hard for farmers to handle.

Electric fencing last for many years, if it is put up in a proper way. It is effective in keeping the animals fenced in and do not hurt the animals. For a regular electric fence 6-10 meters between the poles is needed.

High tensile fencing is an electric fencing with well stretched, thicker wire and thicker fencing poles that are placed at about every 50 meters. This is a good alternative if the pasture is fenced along long, straight stretches. The wires have to be 2.5 mm in diameter and have to be stretched. Thinner wires that are not stretched are too sensitive and will often brake, especially in winter. The wires stretch and slack depending on the temperature in the air. Springs can be used to overcome these problems. Between the parallelograms there must be a pole about every 50 m (Photo 1). Between the poles it is enough to separate the wires with plastic sticks that do not need to be put in the ground (Photo 2).

Net wire fencing is often used to fence in sheep with 3-4 m between poles. The net should be well stretched and fastened with staples in every post. The net wires should only be

locked in corner and breaking points. If cattle are also grazing in pastures with net wire fencing an electric wire needs to be added above the netting to stop cattle from pressing down the net. Electric fencing for sheep, using 4 electric wires, is a good alternative that is cheaper and easier to put up.

ACCESSIBILITY

Pastures are often attractive for visitors. To help visitors, passageways in the fencing can be made. A stile can be put over the fence or a self-closing gate, which is easier for older people and families with pushchairs.

END OF FENCING IN WATER

When pastures go out into the water the last part of the fencing should not be electric. Thicker wire or wooden planks can be used for the part of the fence that goes into the water, making this part less sensitive when the water level is high. This part of the fence should preferably be taken up out of the water before the winter. As far as possible the livestock should graze out into the water to create a blue-zone between the reed bed and land where insects, amphibians, fish and birds get an important habitat.

WHEN WILD ANIMALS CROSS FENCES

If animal paths, deer, elk or other hoofed animals, cross the fence they can be hindered from running into the fence by putting up a plank or pole on top of the fence. Then the animals will see the fence and jump over it.

HOW TO PUT UP FENCING PROPERLY

- Poles have to be barked to ensure that they last a long time
- Poles need to be pointy on the end that is to be put into the ground
- Poles need to be banged down into the ground with a mallet or similar (do not dig a hole!)
- Breaking points have to be made as parallelograms of wooden material. To make the breaking point stronger, a wire is put diagonally from the top of one pole to the bottom of the next and pulled tight. (Photo 5 and 6 detail)
- If the pole has to be split it should not be done with a saw. The pole should be split with an axe or similar, so that the cut follows the fibres of the wood, making it much more resistant to rot.
- The part of the pole below ground can be burned or treated with tar to protect it against rot.
- The harder wood the better. Oak, larch, juniper and slow growing pine are good for making poles.
- All openings have to be made as a single parallelogram on each side of the opening. (Photo 6). If not, the wires will bend the poles and after some years the fence will brake.
- Poles are to be put down into the ground to a depth of 60-80 cm. Even deeper (75-150 cm) for breaking points, that need to be able to handle even larger pressures.
- Three wires are recommended at the height of 50, 80 and 110 cm above ground for cattle. And at least three wires at the heights of 20, 40 and 80 cm for sheep.
- Electric wires have to be isolated from the poles. There are various kinds of isolators but those made of porcelain will last much longer than those made of plastic.
- The straighter the fence is made the less expensive it will be. Try to include woodland edges, forest and other biotopes which are very valuable to graze for biodiversity and that are often left ungrazed nowadays.
- The most common problem with electric fencing is the earthing of the electricity that is not done right or not good enough. 1 m earth per Joule should be used as a guideline.



Photo 5-6. Diagonal wires from the top of the pole to the bottom of the next makes the braking point stronger.



Photo 7. Openings must be made as single parallelograms on each side of the opening. If not, the wires will bend the pole.

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