

Wire Fabric Cages for the EarthTainer

By Dave LaDelfa, earthcage@ladelfa.net

Version 1.0 (June 27, 2011)

Photographs by Jose Aparicio

These instructions presuppose that you have built an EarthTainer™ using version 3.1 (March 20, 2011) of the instructions, or similar. This cage supplants the pea-fence one described in those instructions.

The advantages are that the materials are cheaper and more readily available -- the Wire Fabric can be purchased at the same store as the plastic bins, thus eliminating the need to make multiple shopping trips or wait for mail-order deliveries -- and the construction process is slightly simpler.

The trade-offs are that since the gauge of the wire used is thinner than that of the pea fences, these cages may be more prone to bend under the weight of the plants, and since the spacing of the wires is closer together, maintaining the plant within is less convenient. Also, it doesn't fold flat for storage at the end of the season.



Supplies:

Galvanized Wire Fabric, 40" tall, spaced two inches horizontally and four inches vertically. Comes in 50- and 100-ft rolls. Each cage requires 9 feet of the fabric, so a 50-foot roll, about \$40, will make 5 cages.

4 to 8 each, per cage, of 1/8" or 1/16" Wire Rope Clips (as described in the EarthTainer instructions). Plastic cable/wire ties also work, but you'll need about twice as many of them, because they only grip in one direction, perpendicular to the wires they're on. (The wire rope clips also grip laterally along the length of the wire to a certain extent, but cable ties never get tight enough, and therefore tend to slide.)

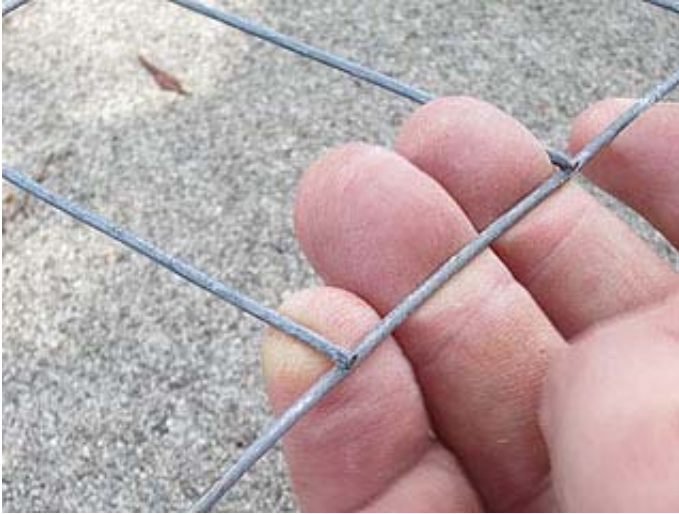
Tools:

Tape measure

Lineman's pliers or wire cutters

Metal straightedge or yardstick

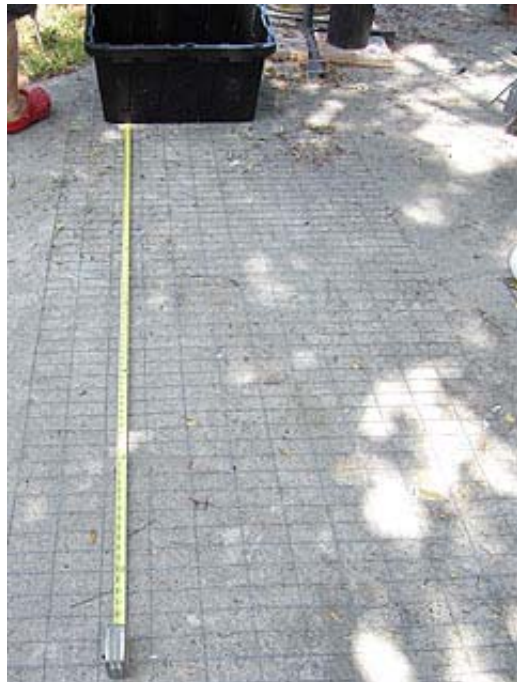
Safety precautions: Wear eye protection and gloves when cutting and folding wire fabric.



Unroll the wire fabric on the ground so that the long wires (spaced every four inches) are on the bottom and the cross-wires (spaced every two inches) are on top. As you fold, these cross-wires will be on the inside of the cage and will help make for neater corners.



Have a helper hold your tape measure down so it hooks on the first cross-wire. A heavy box is also useful.



Pull your tape measure out about ten feet.



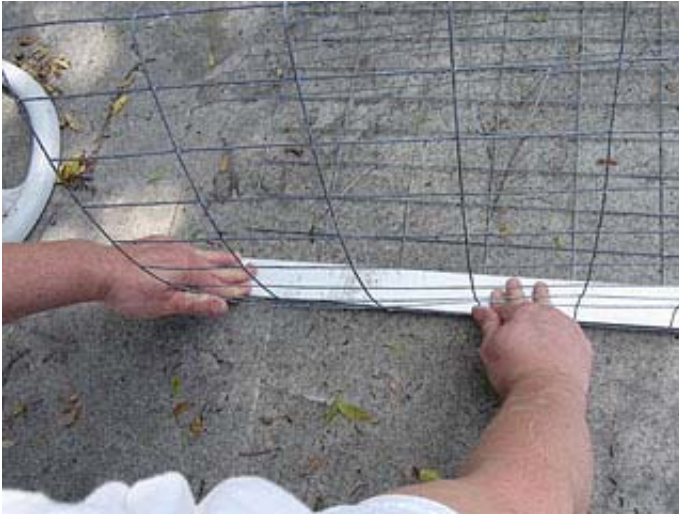
Between the cross-wires at 108 and 110 inches, make a series of cuts going up about halfway across the fabric. Don't cut all the way across, though, or this end will curl up and be difficult. The weight of the rest of the roll will help hold it down for now.



Go back to the loose end of the fabric and put your straightedge down just to the right of the 14 inch mark.



Using the straightedge to hold the fabric against the ground, begin bending it up into a 90-degree angle.



Crease it up all the way across.



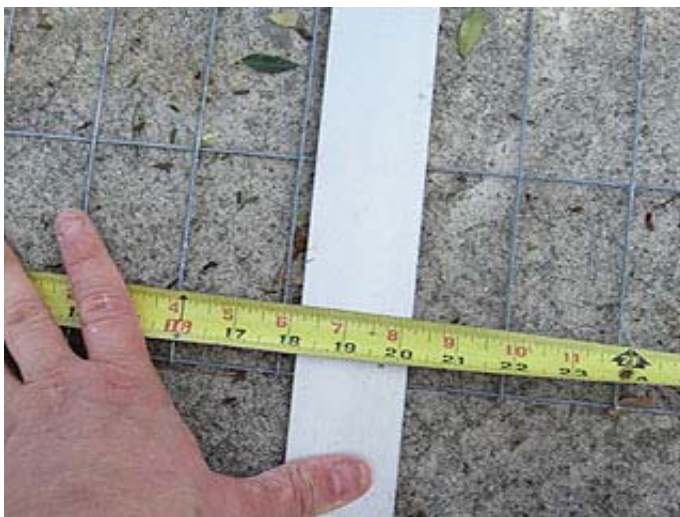
If you stay on the outside of the folding edge, you will avoid getting poked.



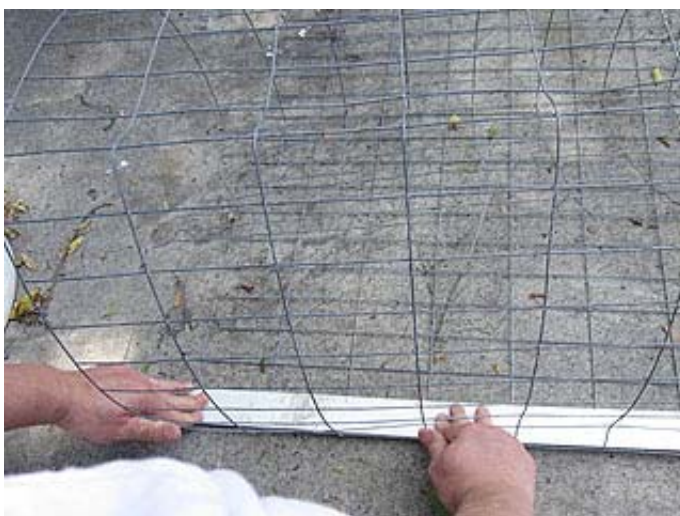
Measuring from the cross-wire you just folded at, put the straightedge down just past the 30 inch mark



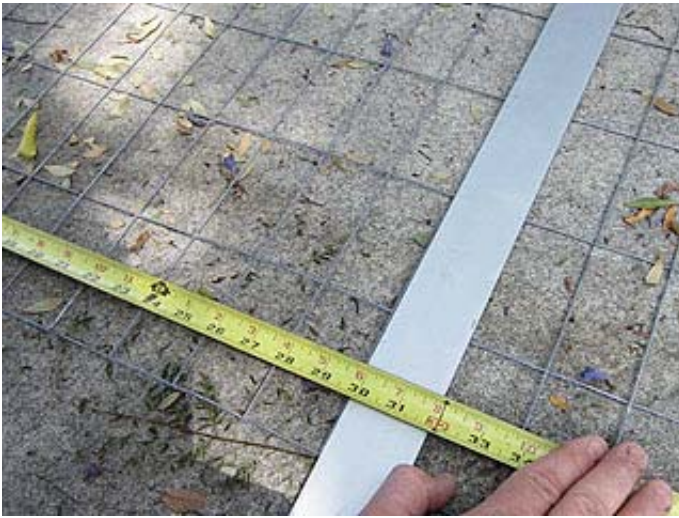
Again, fold it up, curling the first folded section down and inside.



Put the straightedge down at 18 inches



And fold again



Repeat this once more at 30 inches, and then cut across the remainder of the fabric where you begin cutting earlier. There should be 16 inches of material between the final fold and where you cut.

Be careful making the last couple cuts, as the fabric will tend to spring up suddenly towards your face once it's free.



Stand the cage up and form it into a rough rectangle shape. Overlap the two ends so that they form a side of 9 spaces (or 18 inches). Secure the overlap with a few wire rope clips, as shown, or plastic wire ties.



At this point, the cage should form a rectangle with two short sides of 9 spaces (18 inches) and two long sides of 15 spaces (30 inches).



On the non-overlapping short side, count in 3 spaces from the left and make a cut to the right of the cross-wire.



Count 3 spaces from the right and make a cut to the left of that cross wire.



Bend the middle section outward slightly.



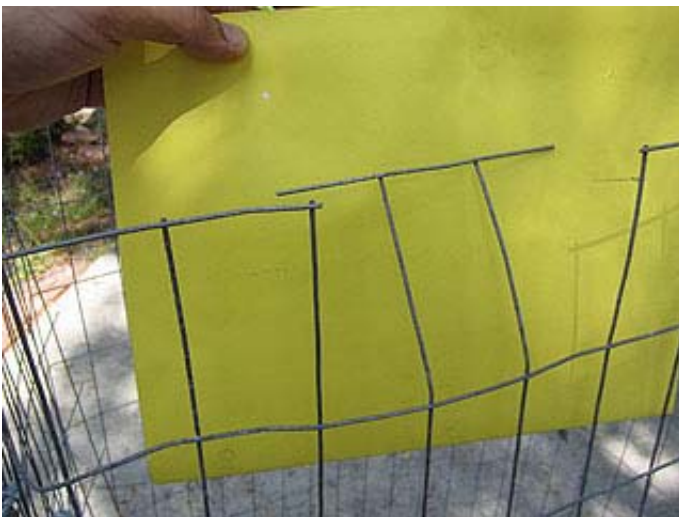
Repeat this on the opposite short side, cutting through both the overlapping layers.



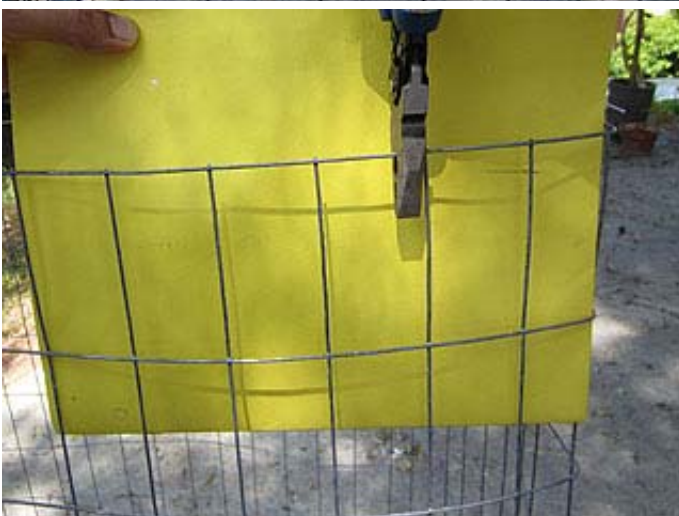
And fold this out the same way.



On one of the long sides, count in 2 spaces and cut to the right of the wire, then skip two spaces and cut to the left of the wire.



Bend this section in towards the center of the cage.



Repeat this process from the other corner, and then again (twice) on the other long side.



Bend the center area between the two folded-in tabs, which should be five spaces wide, outward and then back in on itself as shown.



The cage should now look like this: each short side with one tab bent outward, and each long side with two tabs bent inward and a center tab bent outward and hooked back inward.



Set the cage down on the Earthtainer. Note that the inward-folded tabs support the weight of the cage and the corners hold the cage in position.



On the short sides, bend the tab down and under the container handle.



Curl the hooked center tab of the long sides up underneath the lip of the container.



Next to the filler pipe, make a window by cutting the cross-wire and bending the cut ends out of the way



Reach in through the window and bend the inner tabs down against the moisture cover.



Repeat as necessary, cutting windows wherever convenient. As the season progresses, you can cut additional windows to maintain the plant and get to the fruit.



Twist the loose wire ends on the overlapping short side around the other layer and fold them back for safety, adding additional wire rope clips or wire ties where needed.

Square the corners and flatten the sides of the cage, as necessary.