



Cattle-panel hoophouse. The front and back walls are framed with 1x4 lumber and covered with chicken wire. The door is a hatch that lifts out. Photo: Robert Plamondon

Karen's idea was to make a walk-in pen, which is more convenient to the farmer than a step-in pen. It is also simple, inexpensive, easy to build, and very pleasant to service. Low pens involve some bending and lifting to remove, fill, and replace feed troughs. Taller pens can accommodate hanging tube feeders, which do not need to be removed when the pen is moved. All the equipment is accessible, and the chickens are more visible than in low-roofed houses. These hoophouse pens have never shown any sign of blowing over or shifting position during three years of use in exposed locations. (We have no idea why our hoophouses don't blow over and other, more conventional hoophouses do.)

Lightweight cattle panels are 52 inches wide and 16 feet long. A two-panel house is 8 feet 8 inches long and between 7 and 9 feet wide (a three-panel house would be 13 feet long). The height of the hoop itself is a couple inches less than 6 feet if the house is 8 feet wide. The skids add another two inches of height. A two-panel house, 8 feet wide, has 69 square feet of floor area, about the same as my 8x8 pasture pen, and about half the size of Salatin's pens. A three-panel house would have 104 square feet.

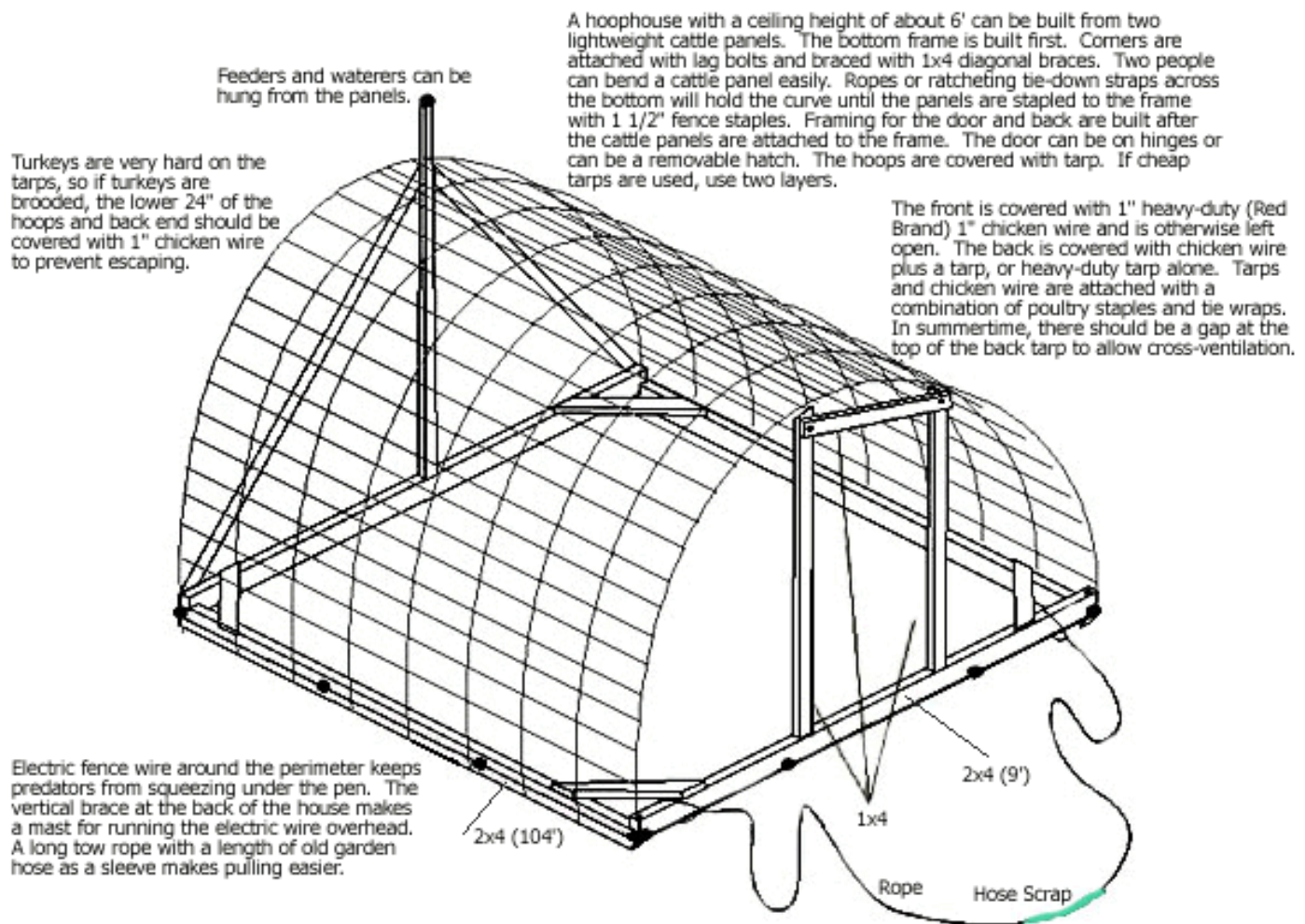
The wooden bottom frame is made from 2x4 lumber, with two skids and two sills. The sills are notched and attached to the skids with lag bolts. Notching the sills reduces the gap under the front and back walls to about 1¾ inches, which is effective in preventing chicks from escaping and raccoons from entering. However, a smaller gap means that the house will snag on smaller obstructions.

The front and back are framed from 1x4 lumber or sections of lightweight cattle panels cut into shape with bolt cutters and lashed in place with wire. The back is covered with a tarp. In summer, an open area is left between the back wall and the roof to provide additional ventilation. The front is covered with 1-inch chicken wire, and has a doorway placed in the middle to allow access. Hinged doors have proved difficult, since the house warps when moved and the doors tend to bind. Lift-out hatches have been more trouble-free.

The house is covered with plastic tarps. Silver tarps are better than the cheaper kinds. Multiple layers of tarp are probably a good idea, especially at the top. It is difficult to achieve a tidy-looking installation with standard-sized tarps, but the houses are extremely comfortable for both the farmer and the chickens.

Karen has also used these houses for turkey flocks, suspending 2x4 roosts from the roof of the house. The only difficulty has been that, once turkeys approach sexual maturity, the toms will attempt to break out to attack the hens in adjacent pens, and they will eventually make holes in the tarps and even in

chicken wire. They can be held in with heavy-duty 1-inch chicken wire if it is attached very securely with a combination of poultry staples and wire or tie wraps. We have found 2-inch chicken wire to be entirely inadequate.



PVC Pipe Frame, Tarp Roof/Walls

Many people build houses from PVC pipe, which is inexpensive, lightweight, and easy to work with. It is cut to length and held together with PVC fittings and pipe glue. Chicken wire can be attached with tie wraps. I have had good luck attaching tarps to PVC pipe with a staple gun.



A 10x12 foot PVC Pen by Brower. Photo: Robert Plamondon

Karen's first stand-up pasture pen was a 10x12 foot PVC house. It was light and airy, comfortable for the birds, and extremely easy to move. It was very inexpensive to build, since we got the pipe for free, and