

Turtle Pen Construction

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The following images of existing pens are suitable for hatchlings, quarantine and recuperating turtles.

To build a pen, select a site, which receives full morning sun and is partially shaded in the afternoons.

Dig a hole 2 feet deep and slightly larger than the outside measurements of pen you wish to build, in the shape and size most suited to the site.

Since this is a project that will be lasting and serviceable for years to come, the wood selected for the part below ground level should be made of redwood or other water/rot-resistant, non-treated wood. The wood above-ground can be made of fir or other sturdy material. Do not treat the wood with chemicals.



These pens were made with redwood but fir would also work:

- 1" x 12" (smaller 3' x 3' pen)
- OR
- 2" x 12" (larger pen) the two pieces were secured atop each other by:
 - 1" x 1" in the corners
 - metal straps screwed into board

Once the "frame" has been constructed, attach 1/4" hardware cloth to the bottom of the pen frame with construction staples. This prevents escapes from adventurous turtles.

1/4" hardware cloth, 1" x 2" redwood strips, 1" x 2" outer frame redwood, simple hardware handles. If you have predators such as raccoons, opossums, coyotes, roadrunners, you will also need a good latch or other locking mechanism.

Insert the completed pen into the previously excavated hole and back-fill around the edges. The inner soil can be your own compost, commercial organic topsoil or compost (chemical and fertilizer-free). Tamp this down to the desired level and then add your plants, hide boxes, hay or leaf piles and you're on your way to providing a safe, secure and easily accessible pen.

One other thought. Bigger is better. Strive for a minimum of 3' x 3' for hatchlings and then consider that these little guys will be living here for around 3 or 4 years until they can be integrated into the adult population.



After these photos were taken, triangular pieces of wood were bolted to each corner. Turtles are great climbers and use corners to “chimney” up and out. They climb bushes, each other, hide boxes and fencing to be free of confinement. The predator proof screened lid will help prevent escapes.



Sightline breaks can be provided by planting low-growing edible plants such as petunias, pansies, impatiens and nasturtiums. Hide boxes can be made of wood, slate or flagstone with wooden supports, terra cotta pots turned on their side, etc.

The water dish in the habitat should be large enough to allow the turtle to soak in it and shallow enough to protect it from drowning. Dehydration is a concern with captive quarantined turtles so every effort must be made to keep the proper level of moisture in the soil as well.

