



How to protect turtle nests in your yard or garden



Virginia is home to 19 terrestrial, fresh and brackish water species and subspecies of turtle. This document does not pertain to our five sea turtle species. For sea turtle nests please contact the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's Stranding Response Program at (757) 385-7575.

If you discover a turtle nesting on your property, leave the nest where it is and protect it from predators with a "nest cage". Moving the eggs will most likely destroy them. Using a few supplies and following these easy steps, you can build a nest cage that protect the eggs and hatchlings from predation while letting the hatchlings to escape.

When to look for turtle nests

Most of Virginia's 19 turtles (excluding sea turtles) nest every year in late spring through early summer (early May through July). Nests may be found in a variety of locations where sandy and/or well-drained soil is exposed to sun for most of the day, including sand banks along rivers and lakes, gardens, gravel driveways and road shoulders.

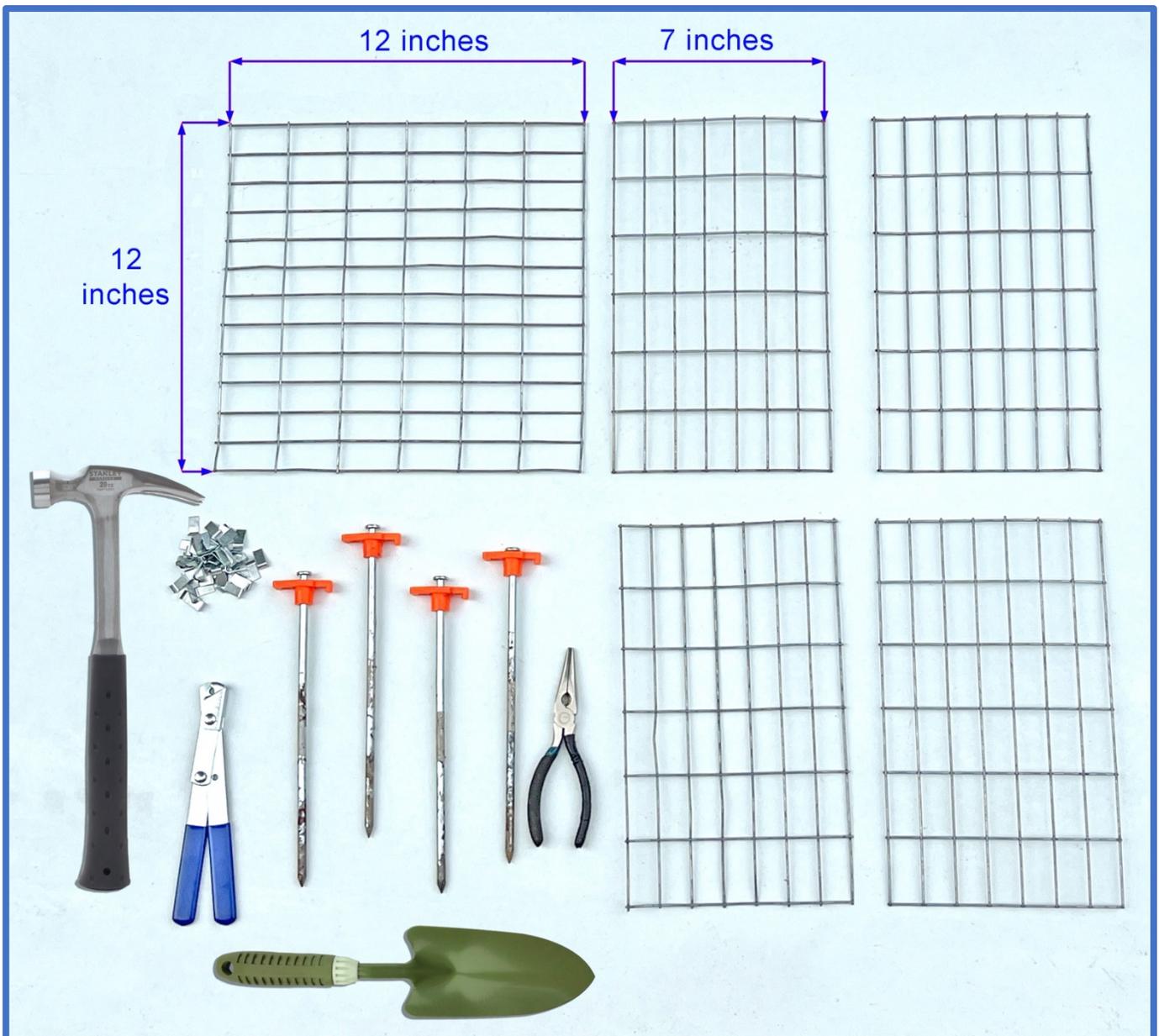
Depending on the species and weather conditions, hatchlings may begin to emerge as soon as two months, although 3-4 months is more typical. Some species may however overwinter in the nest cavity and not emerge until the following spring. After a successful hatch, there is often a small hole where the hatchlings emerged from their nest. If you find egg shells outside of the nest cavity, this is an indication the nest was predated.

When and how long to keep a nest cage in place

Predation of a turtle nest can occur at any time so ideally the nest cage would be installed immediately, within minutes of the female leaving the area, and kept up through the fall or spring. However, if the cage is along a gravel drive way or other area where you cannot leave it installed for an extended period of time, leave the cage in place for as long as possible. You do not need to remove the cage to allow the hatchlings to disperse as the gaps in the mesh are large enough for them to escape without assistance. For more information on the turtles of Virginia, you can purchase a copy of *A Guide to the Turtles of Virginia* at shopdwr.com

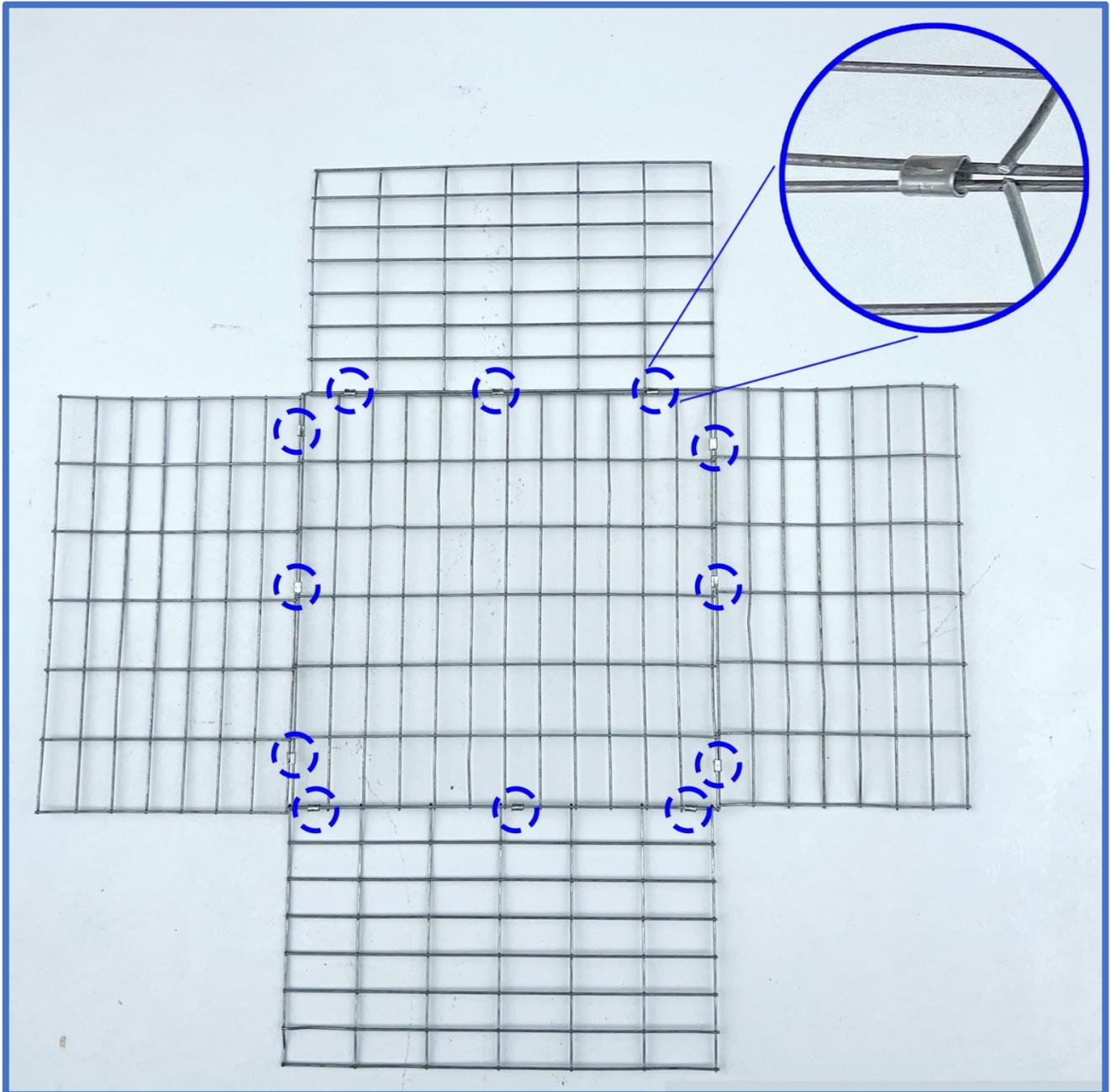
Materials

- Roll of mesh wire fencing with 1 in. x 2 in. or 3 in. mesh. Mesh with a gap smaller than 1 inch can prevent hatchlings from being able to escape.
- Package of wire cage clips
- Wire cage clip pliers
- Wire cutters or needle nose pliers
- 4 stakes (tent stakes)
- Galvanized wire, twine, or some other sturdy line
- Hammer
- Hand held garden trowel



Construction

- Use wire cutters to cut out the following:
- 1 – 12in. x 12in. top section
- 4 – 7in. x 12in. side sections
- Use wire cutters or needle nose pliers to attach each side cage piece to the top.
- Use 3 evenly spaced clips per side.



Completed nest cage



Deployment

- Use hammer claw or spade to outline where cage will go and dig down about 4 inches.
- Place completed nest cage over nest and bury lower half in soil.
- Pack sand or soil around sides of cage.
- Stake down cage to prevent predators from trying to pull up nest cage.

