

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2007

Hay Baling

See update at bottom of this post.

We don't own a tractor, so we cut and bale our hay by hand. Last year, we stored it loose in several sheds and anywhere we could find a few square feet of dry storage space. This year, we have a hand baler. A friend in Texas sent us this link - <http://texaspinestraw.tamu.edu/baling.html> - and R set to work on it. The baler in the plans is for use in making a bale of pine straw, but it works just fine baling our mixed-grass hay.

Our hayfield is about 10-12 acres, so obviously we are doing this a little at a time. R cuts the grass with our brush-mower. Once it's dry, I use a fan rake to rake it up in windrows.



This is the hand baler, all set up to make a bale of hay.



Right now we are using baling wire because we had two rolls of it in the garage, left by a prior owner. The plans call for the use of baling twine, which will be much faster to set up, and we plan to buy some on our next trip to town. Note that the wire/twine is not run through the eye screws on the bottom of the baler, but between the eye and the wooden piece, just to keep it in place. Once you finish tying up the bale, the wire/twine slips out. Quite ingenious!



Setting up the wire for a new bale.



So, first we string the wire/twine, then shut the door of the baler. Hay is added through the opening in the top. When full, the plunger is used to pack down the hay, then more is added. Finally, with the plunger depressed, the bale is tied up tightly.



Release the plunger, open the door, and remove the bale of hay.



They are larger than what we'd envisioned. My best guess is that they are 1/2 to 2/3 the size of a regular small square bale. This will make storage and feeding so much easier.



While I'm down in the hayfield, I fill up the cart with loose hay for today's feeding.



Till next time...

UPDATE 6-9-2009: A reader kindly informed me that the link to the baler plans is broken. I did some googling and found the same article at <http://www.naturalresources.msstate.edu/pdfs/pine.pdf>.

UPDATE 6-15-2011: Look [here](#) for a video of the baling process and how to attach the baling twine. They are using a metal baler but the process is the same. Instead of the piece they slip the twine's "eye" over, our baler has two little nails on the back near the top for the same reason/use. Also notice that the baler in the video has wheels; we've talked about doing this too. There are some additional photos of our baler [here](#). Also, look at the [photos of balers](#) at the site with the video; they too might help clear up those vague directions at the site of the plans.

UPDATE 11-27-11: It seems that the link to the baler plans is broken once again. Here is another; hopefully this one will stay active for awhile!
<http://essmextension.tamu.edu/pinestraw/baling.html>

ALSO, I found this website with directions to [build a hand-powered leaf and hay baler](#). While this one is a different type - horizontal rather than vertical - the principle is the same, and some might appreciate the step-by-step building instructions.