

Protecting Turtle Nests

Turtle Nesting - Wisconsin is home to 11 species of turtles, all of which nest annually in late spring through early summer (nesting can begin as early as May 20 and often extends through July 7). Turtle 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 (e.g., sand banks along rivers and lakes, gardens, gravel driveways, road shoulders). Some turtle species nest within a few feet of open water, while others will travel up to 1,000 feet or more away from open water to nest. Depending on the species and weather conditions, turtles may begin to hatch in as little as 2 months, although 3-4 months is more common. In addition, some species, such as the painted turtle, may overwinter in their nests and will not emerge until the following spring. After a successful hatch, there is often a small hole where the hatchlings emerged from their nest.



Nesting Predation - If you find a turtle nest on your property, it is best to leave the nest where it is and protect it from predators by putting a "nest cage" over the area. Predation of a turtle nest can occur at any time so ideally the enclosure would be installed immediately (e.g., within minutes of the female leaving the area) and kept up through the fall or spring. However, if the cage is in an area where you cannot leave it installed for an extended period of time (e.g., gravel driveway), leave the cage in place for at least 1-2 weeks.



Constructing a Nest Cage - A nest cage should be constructed with wire fencing material (similar to chicken wire but larger) with openings of 1 in x 3 in. The cage will consist of one top piece (approximately 2 ft x 2 ft) and four side pieces (approximately 2 ft x 10 in). The five fencing pieces can be assembled together with metal fencing clips. Once completed, the nest cage should be placed over the nest with the lower 1-2 in buried into the soil and staked down. This will prevent predators, such as raccoons, opossums and skunks, from getting into the nest, but the openings will allow for solar exposure and will be large enough that the hatchlings can emerge and exit on their own through the holes in the fencing.

