

Round Bale Silage
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Round bale silage is an opportunity to store small quantities of forage at optimum maturity. Often farmers are faced with an odd field that is ready for harvest but the weather is not suitable for haying and there is no silo space available for use.

If a round baler is available, no extra equipment is needed to make silage. There has been much published about bagging round bales for silage where small quantities are harvested and where one bale at a time is needed to feed a small group of dry cows, heifers, beef, or sheep.

Round bale silos that are tailored to the size of the field available for harvest or to the number of bales that will be made in one or two days is a different opportunity. This method provides an economical way to capture any quantity of forage at its optimum quality even when it is not good hay weather. The silo will be as big as the quantity of forage harvested and then sealed. When the next field is ready in a few days or weeks a new silo will be built. The silos can be one bale, two bales or three bales in width depending on the size herd to be fed. The length will be determined by the field size and number of bales made on harvest day.

The bales are placed on well-drained ground with easy access for feeding or hauling. The silo can be handy to the feed bunk, the heifer or dry cow pasture or at the edge of a field several miles from home for hauling at a later date.

The wide range of volume, location, labor and timing increase the opportunity to harvest forage at its highest feed value.

Some tips for making round bale silage:

1. Cut what can be baled and stored in one day.
2. Cure as rapidly as possible to a dry matter content of 40-50%.
3. Set the bale size to fit your machinery, bags and lifetime power of your moving equipment.
4. Select a well-drained handy silo site.
5. Place the bales in an end to end row, 1 or 2 rows wide, as long as necessary or convenient.
6. Cover immediately with black plastic about 20 feet wide and as long as the silo.
7. Bury the edges of the plastic, keeping the plastic as tight as possible to the top and sides of the bales. The edges may be covered with dirt, sand or lime.
8. Bury the ends the same as sides.
9. If two bales wide, place the bales as tightly together as possible and fill the center hole at ground level with forage or sand.
10. Place an air lock every 3-5 bales of length to hold down plastic and prevent air from traveling under the plastic the full length of the silo if a puncture occurs during storage or when one end is opened for feeding.

A simple air lock can be made by using two pieces of cord wood and three baler twine strings. The strings are tied to the ends and middle of one stick, on one side of the silo, placed over the silo and tied to the other stick on the other side short enough so neither stick quite touches the ground. The strings will hold the plastic tight against the baled silage and can be easily removed as the silo is fed out.

Open one end to remove bales for feeding then close end of silo until next feeding to limit air access.

The round bale silo idea combines several options to give it great potential.

1. Silage can be made without additional equipment or large horsepower tractors.
2. Silage can be made when a given field or any size is at optimum feed value.
3. Silage can be stored at the most convenient location for harvesting or feeding.
4. The cost of black plastic in 20 to 40 foot widths is about 20% of the cost of bags.
5. It makes a convenient feed supply to supplement a pasture in mid-summer, fall or winter, feed a group of heifers or fenceline feed the milking herd in dry lot.
6. It is useful for small farmers who do not have enough feed to warrant a permanent silo or for large farmers whose silo is full of first crop and does not have a convenient way to store a small quantity of feed at a special time, at a special location and for a special purpose.