

How to put together a Coop-8 crate and not lose your mind or fight with your spouse:

First off, let me say that these instructions are written by a fellow pastured poultry producer and came out of a desire to see others be successful putting together a Coop-8 crate, as it took us several screw ups to get there. The crates are well-worth this frustration, as the little side doors are extremely handy for unloading small birds, and in general I've found these crates to be up to the job. A rubber or plastic mallet is extremely helpful if not necessary for this job. We found plastic mallets work better.

So back to putting them together... There are a few keys:

1. The instructions in the package are a reasonable start but inadequate. I know farmers don't like to read instructions, but give these the attention they are due.
2. When putting the sides up, it is **EXTREMELY** important to make sure all of the bottom joints on the sides are pushed all the way into the sleeves on the bottom of the crate before locking the side into place. There are little notches on the corners of the sides that need to click. **DO NOT** proceed to putting on the top before all of the sides are up and locked. On a couple of ours, we had to use a utility knife to take a sliver of plastic off the notch to get said locking effect to work.
3. ***If at any step you notice a previous step has somehow undone itself, take everything apart back to that step and start again. Trust me.***
4. Now for the top. This is where you just want to push through and be done, but carelessness or ignorance here can lead to frustrating results and/or breaking the plastic. (Don't worry, hairline fractures don't seem to affect the integrity of the crates so long as they are put together solidly.) The top piece has a dual locking system of sorts. You will have more success if you get the notches through the first set of locks before attempting to secure it all the way down.
 - a. Firstly, notice on the sidewalls these 2" wide guides/tabs on the inside of the crate. These are very easy to get caught in the process of putting on the lid, and you will not be able to see your folly and the failure to lock will be maddening. As you put on the lid and before attempting to lock in place, check that each of these tabs is indeed on inside of the crate and not pushed into the lid structure.
 - b. Next, gently pull out on each side of the crate and lock the lid into place halfway, what amounts to the first of two steps in locking the top. It's best to not use a mallet at this stage. You want to get everything in place for the mallet to come in and do the final

notch/locking. Don't worry about being able to see the dual notches, just know that you don't want to slam it all the way locked on the first go-around getting the top on. It's best to work in a circular pattern, i.e., don't do one end and then the opposite end and then try to work through the middle, do one corner and then move to the middle, then the next corner, etc.

- c. Once you have the top on, you will see the top of the sidewalls through the little holes on the edges of the top part of the crate, but at this point they aren't flush with one another. Now use your mallet to lock the top into place, so the two pieces of plastic are flush. Rather than hitting the mallet on the very edge of the corner, you'll have more success if you hit it on the raised ledge near the corner. Again, move in a circle, and don't proceed until the one adjacent is locked.
5. You should have a solidly put together crate at this point. If you don't, don't despair, just gently take apart to the point of error and start again. It's not the end of the world if you break one of the joints – the other ones will fill in for strength -- just be gentle, move slowly and take (mental) breaks if necessary. If something is not working, DO NOT FORCE IT, just dissect, and look for what's holding you up. When done properly, these crates are very easy to put together, it's just learning to do it properly that's frustrating. Hopefully, after you read these instructions and assemble one, you will think the author is nuts, as it just isn't that difficult. Good. That's how I know that I did my job.

Best wishes. Suzanne Nelson, Cozi Farm, Saxapahaw, NC