

A Gate is a Gate is a Gate...

What you need to know about shopping for one

by Martin A. Wilke



A GATE IS A GATE IS A GATE? Well, not quite. All gates are not created equal and you should know what that means. Face it—if you have livestock, you have fences, and if you have fences, you have gates. There are a lot of good companies building gates these days, and when you need one it can be quite confusing.

Like corral panels, gates come in all weights. In an earlier article on panels (NWHS, June 2004), I made the statement that you'll likely get what you pay for. This is also true of gates. Most gates are made of steel, and the more steel you buy, the more you'll pay, but you'll likely be happier with your purchase. Just don't buy more than you need.

The truth is that you can now buy a tube gate for the same price or less than a panel gate costs.

I tell customers to go out and look at the gate they are thinking of buying, and to lift the end of it to see what they are getting for their money. I'm always amazed at the number of people who continue to think that all gates are created equal. In fact, they are sort of like cars... you can spend as little or as much as you want.

Twelve-foot long gates can weigh as little as 40 pounds or as much as 150 pounds. You should know also that twelve foot gates are actually about eleven feet nine inches long. This is to allow for the hinges and the latch. A twelve foot gate fits a twelve foot opening.

Most gate companies make gates in lengths from four to sixteen feet. Some also make a three foot mesh gate. Larger openings call for longer gates, and most companies will make eighteen and twenty foot gates. These will take a strong post to hold them, and it might be wiser to use two

shorter gates. If you can't do that and you need a long gate, you can also get wheel kits from most farm stores and co-ops. They support the weight of the gate and keep it from sagging. Because not many eighteen and twenty foot gates are sold, you may have to special order them, but the personnel in the local stores will help you.

Now, about the details... most gates are made of steel tubes. They can have four, five, six, or seven horizontal tubes, but most gates have six tubes. The tubing can be as heavy as 12 gauge (that's heavy!) or as light as 22 gauge (light!). Many gates are a mixture of 16 and 18 gauges. Many are even lighter. So how do you decide? Simply by answering the questions about how you plan to use the gate.



Before shopping, answer some simple questions:

- What are you going to do with this gate?
- How much stress will the gate be under?
- How much do you want to pay?
- Do you want this gate to last forever?
- Do you want it painted or galvanized?
- How tall and how long do you want it to be?
- What sort of latch do you want on the gate?
- Are you installing the gate yourself?
- Will livestock be in contact with the gate?
- If so, is there a chance that they will be pushing on the gate?

If you're breaking mustangs, it might be a good idea to have a 14 gauge gate, 60" tall (by the time you mount it, it will be about 70" tall). That gate will last a long, long time and cost you, relatively speaking, a lot of money. If you simply want to fill a hole in a fence to keep honest people out, a 20 gauge, five rail gate will probably do just fine. So decide, lift, and talk to the knowledgeable people who work in the farm stores and co-ops all over the country.

A newer style of gate is made from a tube frame. Rather than horizontal tubes, the main body of the gate is made of a rod mesh. These gates work well for sheep, goats, calves, etc., and some folks use them for horses. The mesh is generally made of approximately 1/4" rod and the openings vary from 2" x 4" to 6" x 8". If you use mesh gates with horses, use the mesh with the small openings. The larger openings will allow a horse to put its hoof through.

that you can now buy a tube gate for the same price or less than a panel gate costs, and a tube gate is much safer for stock due to the lack of sharp edges and pop rivets.

Most gates are painted, and most companies have switched to powder coating. It is a better way to paint, but it's still paint. Galvanizing offers a better level of protection, and hot-dip galvanizing offers the best and most durable finish you can get, but it also costs the most.

The bottom line is simply this: you'll get what you pay for. Know what you want and shop around. Lift the gate and you might be surprised at how light—or how heavy—it is. Be an informed consumer. Ask tough questions at your local farm and ranch supply store or co-op. They're there to help you, and they'll be glad to answer your questions.

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More details: hinges come in different styles. Heavier gates tend to come with a pair (or three for the really heavy models) of 12" J-bolts that go through a wood (or metal) post. Remember, a heavier gate will require a heavier post. If you plan to install the gate yourself, you have to drill holes through the post, install the bolts, and hang the gate. Keep in mind that the gate can be quite heavy. Some sixteen foot gates can weigh 300 pounds. Lighter gates often come with a lighter hinge and a pair of lag bolts that go into the post.

There are quite a number of good latches available. Gate manufacturers generally offer a horse (lever) latch which can be opened and closed while on horseback. Most stores also sell what is known as a *slam latch*. If you slam the gate, it latches itself. Many gates come with a chain latch. The chain goes around the post and drops into a notch. These are usually included at no charge, but they aren't as convenient as lever latches or slam latches.

Besides tube gates, some manufacturers still make panel gates. Panel gates are made of formed, galvanized panels and they are pop riveted together. They can have sharp edges and wind and snow can flex the gate to the point where the rivets fall out. Privately, most gate companies will tell you that they'd like to discontinue panel gates, but that customers continue to insist on them. The truth is