

7 Essential Steps To Straw Bale Success - Day 5

Making Custom Bales

Every straw bale home requires a lot of custom bales. Just look at this window as an example. How do you take a rectangular bale and make it fit a window like this? A number of different things are in play with this window; one of which is the creation of custom bales. To create a custom bale, you need to know how to cut and retie bales. You also need to know how to notch and shape bales.

RE-TYING



Cutting a bale is not as simple as it sounds. You cannot simply cut a bale to the length you need as you would a piece of wood. If you did that, the strings would break and the bale would fall apart. Instead, you have to mark the bale where you want it cut and then use a set of baling needles, like the one shown here, to tie new strings in place before you cut the old ones. I have seen people use bale presses and cut the strings first, but this is a waste of time and totally unnecessary. By using a good baling needle, you can retie a bale and create two custom bales from one in a short amount of time. The most important skill for retying bales is the Miller's knot. This simple and strong knot is the only thing you need to keep the bales from falling apart on you.

Learn this knot and you can retie bales stronger than the baling machine that created them and in less time than any other knot I know.

NOTCHING AND SHAPING



Notching and shaping bales requires the use of a chainsaw and a can of spray paint. It is a simple yet important part of baling. You will need to create notches in the bales like the one shown in the picture below in order to fit the bales around posts and other framing members. When notching for posts, the tendency is to cut a tight joint. Don't bother trying this as it will waste your time. Slightly over-cut the notch and you can always come back and stuff the over-cut space with straw if it is too large. Be careful not to cut the strings on the bale while notching. Some notches can be quite detailed and intricate. If you spend a lot of time working on a bale only to cut the twine by mistake, you will quickly understand why I say be careful not to cut the strings. Any notch less

than 6" deep can be made without too much concern for the location of the twine; however, a notch greater than 6" deep will require the extra step of tying back the twine or retying a new piece of twine as the cut will get into the existing twine and will cut it free.

Tomorrow we'll take a look at the best methods of shaping your bales to get smooth and rounded edges etc.

Happy Baling,

Andrew Morrison
Professional Straw Bale Contractor