

## How I Castrate a Calf

It's been 20 years since I first took matters into my own hands, literally. When you grow up on a farm, you learn some skills out of necessity. You learn them by watching your grandfather at work, and by glancing over the veterinarian's shoulder, and by doing them yourself. You learn them to save time, to save money, or to ensure ongoing health and value of your herd. This is why I learned the steps involved in young-calf castration.

It is an easy process when it comes down to it. It only takes a few tries before you get the process down, but it's also crucial you know the right steps. Even though a botched castration poses severe health risks to your animal, its financial and logistic benefits make it a skill you should know when you live on a farm.

The tools for the job are simple. You need a castration band, a small rubber ring about the size of a Cheerio. An elastrator, a pliers-like device that is used to spread open the castration band. Oh! You also need to catch a calf. Optionally, a calf stanchion helps the procedure go more smoothly. A calf stanchion is a type of fixed restraint for the calf that works by holding the calf's head in place. However, if you have a little help, just holding the calf still for a few minutes works well too.

The first step is restraining the animal. Once that is done, you need to load the castration band on the elastrator. At the end of the elastrator, you will find four metal "fingers" that expand and contract when the handle is gripped and released. The castration band rolls down the fingers to be loaded into place.

The next step involves getting behind and reaching under the calf. You and the calf are going to get acquainted at this stage. With your palm up and fingers slightly curled, you feel for the testicles. When you've found them, wrap your fingers around them, still palm up, and pull downward in a gentle motion. What you're doing here is ensuring that both testicles are accessible and where they're supposed to be.

Next, while holding the testicles in one hand, you take the loaded elastrator and squeeze the handle. This opens the band. Then you slide the spread band over the testicles, making sure that both testicles are through and below the band. Next, slowly relax the elastrator until the band

tightens. The band remains on the testicles for a few days to a week while they shrivel up and eventually fall off.

This is how I castrate a calf. It's a non-invasive, simple, and effective way to ensure good herd health and increase the value of a calf on the market. It's also a great conversation starter at parties.