

Make the Perfect Perch For Your Chickens Sitting Pretty

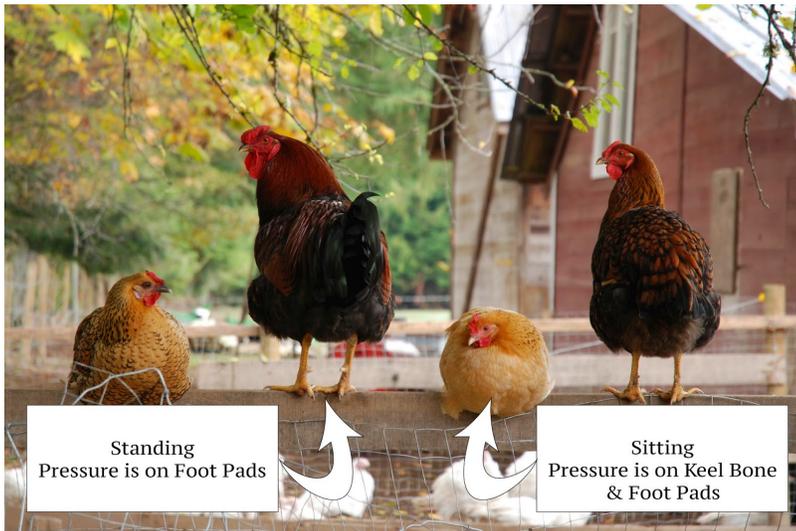
Perches provide a secure place for your chickens to rest at night and they have the added benefit of keeping chickens off the floor where they can be soiled by droppings.

Most books on coop design tell poultry owners to provide at least 10 inches of perch space for each bird in the flock. However, books generally don't specify the diameter or the shape of the perch. This isn't too surprising because there hasn't been any research done on the subject until very recently.

In 2011, a group of poultry researchers in Germany conducted a series of experiments. Their objective was to evaluate various perch designs in order to eliminate health problems that have been traced to perching - specifically skin lesions and bone deformities.

To do the research, they used sensors to measure the pressure exerted by the perch on a chickens foot pads and keel bone (breast bone). They measured the pressure when the chicken was:

1. Standing as a chicken often do during the day.
2. Sitting as a chicken does at night when sleeping.

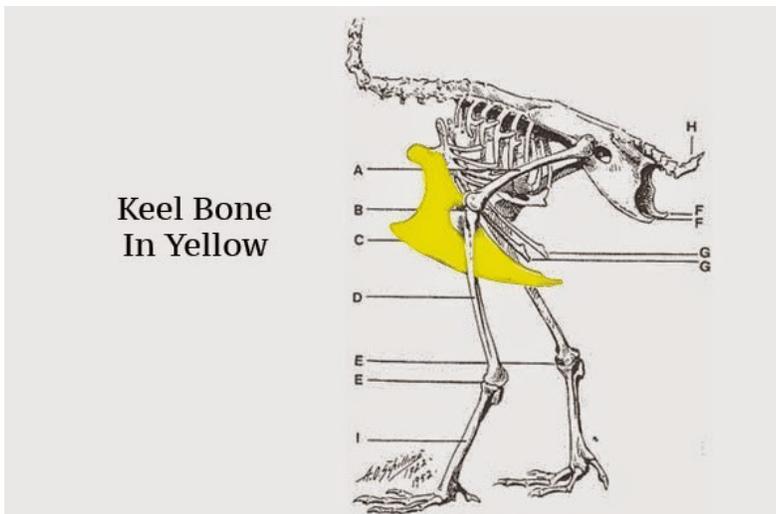


In the former case, all of the pressure from the perch would be exerted on the chickens feet. In the latter case, the pressure would be distributed between the chickens feet and its keel bone. The best perch sizes and shapes would exert the least amount of pressure in these places.

For the test, the researchers looked at round, square, and oval perch shapes with diameters ranging from 34 to 60 millimeters (1.3 to 2.4 inches) per the below diagram.

Research Results

Good news and bad news..... There wasn't one best shape, it depended:



- Oval-shaped perches performed best when chicken's were standing.
- However, when a chickens is seated, the square perch performs better because it exerts less pressure on the chicken's keel bone.

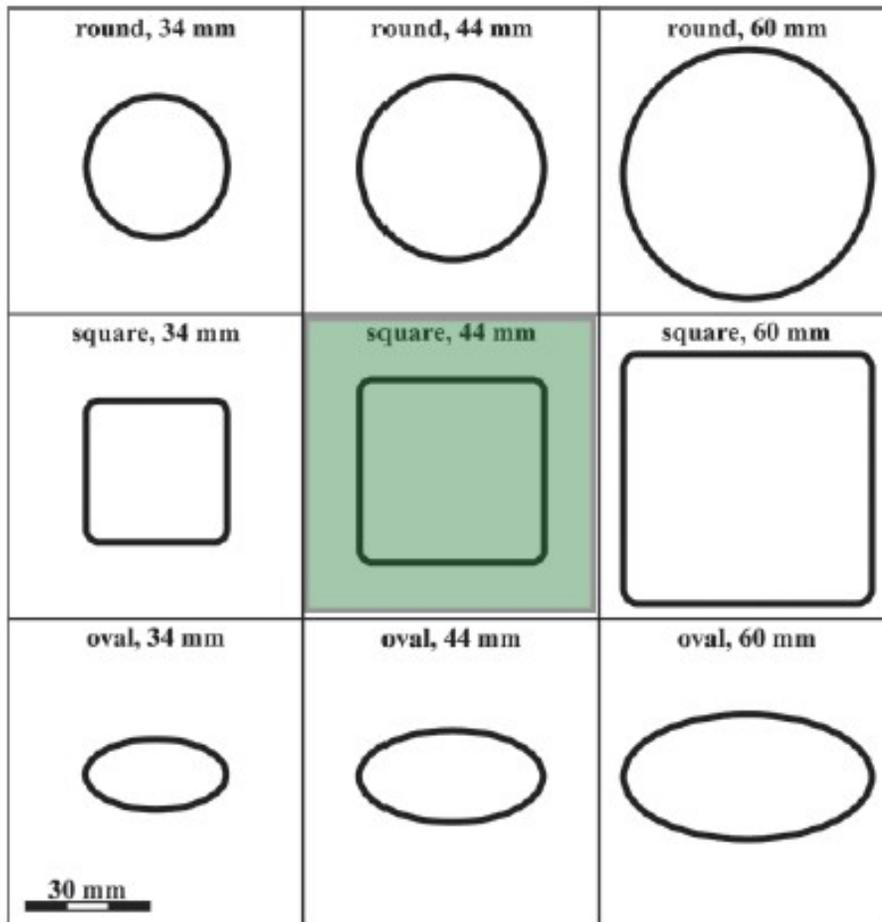
Recommendation - It's Hip to Be Square!

In a commercial poultry house, chickens may have limited access to the outdoors and may spend most of their waking hours standing on a perch. The performance of the perch when a chicken is standing matters to a commercial

operator.

However, this is less true for us backyard chicken owners. Most of our birds aren't locked into a coop all day so the amount of time they spend standing on a perch is more limited.

It's during the evening that our chickens return to the coop to go to bed. When they roost at night, they occupy a seated position. Therefore, we would recommend choosing a square shaped perch as this seems more relevant to the lifestyle of a backyard chicken. According to the German study, one with a diameter of about 44mm (1.7 inches) is best.



In the U.S. you can't buy lumber that is exactly 44mm x 44mm so you have two choices:

1. Buy lumber that is nominally 2 inches x 2 inches (The actual dimensions of this are 38 mm x 38 mm). This would still be a decent compromise choice and you don't have to do any cutting. Just hang the perch.
2. Buy what is nominally a 4 inch x 4 inch board (89mm x 89mm actual size) and cut it down to 44mm x 44 mm. You can do this yourself if you have a table saw. Some lumber yards will cut a piece to size for you for a small fee if you don't want to mess with it yourself.

Whatever option works best for you, you should round off the edges so that they are not sharp and won't cut your chickens feet.

Source: Pressure load on keel bone and foot pads in perching laying hens in relation to perch design. T. Pickel, L. Schrader and B. Scholz, Institute of Animal Welfare and Animal Husbandry, University of Muenster, as published in Poultry Science, 2011, p. 715-724.