

INTEGRATING TREES INTO FREE RANGE POULTRY FARMING



In free-range poultry farming, planting trees on the run is essential for the animal's welfare. The presence of trees on the run:

- encourages natural behavior (running, scratching, pecking, foraging, etc.)
- reduces stress
- protects poultry from the wind, sun and rain,
- limits parasitism (reduces the accumulation of droppings at the hatch exit by encouraging the animals to go further using the facilities),
- protects poultry from predation and encourages the presence of insects that can supplement the poultry's diet
- ...

The aim is to create a link between the building and the run by planting trees higher and higher, especially at the end of the run: the trees should act as landmarks and guides to help the poultry move around.

• The perimeter

The aim is to create a windbreak without preventing the proper renewal of the building's air.

i The hedge slows the wind over a distance of up to 20 times its height.

• The exit space of the traps

This is the first area to be explored. It must therefore be attractive, reassuring and guide the animals towards areas further away from the building. The aim is to create an area of transition rather than stagnation.

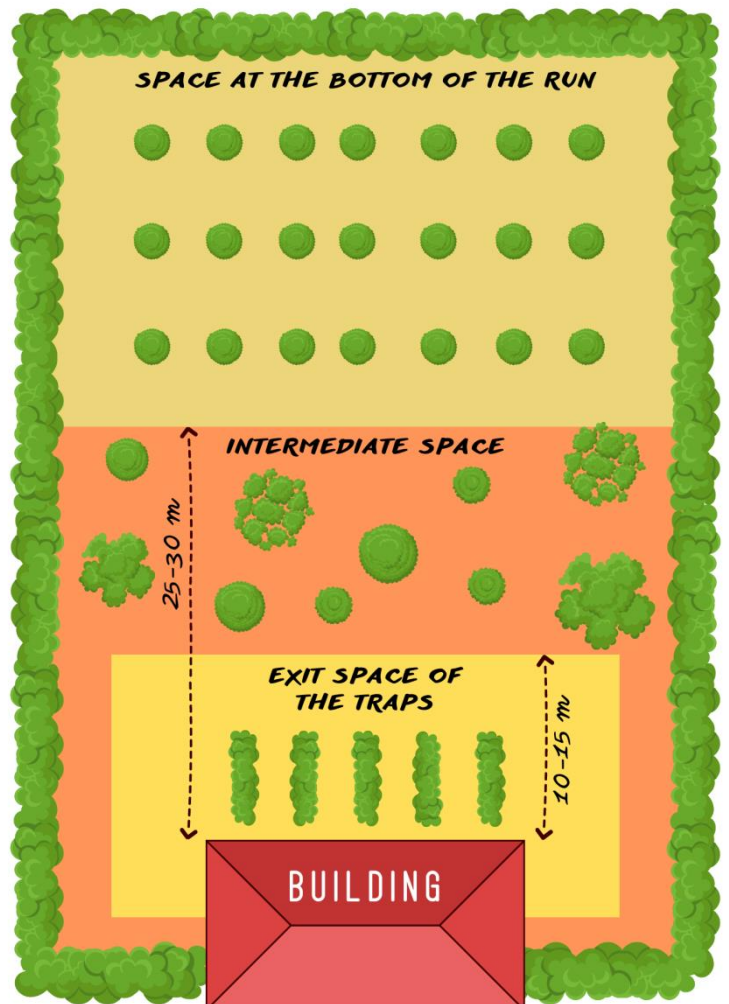
• The intermediate space

In this area of the run, the aim is to encourage the birds to go further and to provide them with protection from the wind, sun and predators.

• The space at the bottom of the run

We always try to attract poultry and offer them protection with lines of trees or copses.

i Without any trees, few chickens visit the area beyond 30 metres from the building, and virtually none visit the area beyond 70 metres from the building.



The success of these projects depends on support adapted to each case (mobile huts or fixed building), taking into account the limitations and opportunities of each project and objectives of each farmer.



Key points

- ✓ Beware of changes in air flow in relation to traps.
- ✓ Be careful not to over- or under-densify the plants.
- ✓ Ideal shade coverage is between 30 and 50%.
- ✓ The distance between 2 shaded areas should not exceed 15 to 20 meters.
- ✓ The landscaping must be appropriate and effective as soon as the traps come out.



Testimonial

Sébastien Mary, poultry farmer in Heiteren (France)

"I planted a hedge all around the perimeter of the courses. It is made up of around 90 melliferous species. It provides food for the beehives and acts as a windbreak and privacy screen. I've also planted more than 2,000 hazelnut trees on my two courses, with a different variety on each course. This means I can offer two varieties for sale.

The planting must be close to the traps exits, but not too close, so as to maintain a well-ventilated, sunny area that enables us to maintain a manageable sanitary quality. The planting of trees and hedges has encouraged the natural behaviour of the poultry: exploring, scratching, etc. It also means we can work in a much more pleasant environment and integrate the farm better into the landscape.

I have observed that the chickens that arrive at the end of the run, near the perimeter hedge, generally stay there all day, especially in summer. During this period, it's mainly the shade that's sought: the more foliage the trees have, the more chickens will take shelter there."

Something to think about?

"You have to remember to protect the plantations, which are sensitive to competition from weeds. On our farm we grow miscanthus, which was used to mulch the plants. We didn't need to use plant protectors because the hazel trees were planted about a year before the poultry arrived. Only the trees closest to the hatches are protected by netting, as they are the most exposed."

What if you had to do it all over again?

"I would plant comb strips after the hatches: the bushes aren't too high and so don't cast a shadow directly at the exit from the building, encouraging the birds to get out and explore the run."