

Precast Deck Piers

EZ-Tube

E-Z Crete

603.313.6462

e-zcrete.com

List price: \$187 (includes base section, four 12-inch-diameter upper sections, and galvanized connecting rod)

by Mike Guertin

Last fall my local lumberyard began stocking EZ-Tube precast deck piers. The display was intriguing—a simple stack of precast concrete sections tied together with a galvanized rod. I gave the system a try last summer on a small deck to see how easy they were to actually install, and to see if they're cost effective compared with pier-type footings that have been formed and poured on site.

Installation

Dig the hole, drop in the sections, backfill, and you're ready to build—or, at least, that's what the manufacturer claims. But whether you're pouring in place or using a precast pier, there's no getting around the fact that you'll need to dig and backfill the footing holes. The only difference

with precast piers is that the bottom of the hole needs to be absolutely level for the EZ-Tube base so that the sections stack up plumb.

Once the hole is prepped, it takes only about a half-hour to assemble the pier. You start by inserting the galvanized rod through the base section—which weighs a manageable 80 pounds or so—and lowering the base into the hole (see photos, page 50).

Once the base is set and level, the remaining sections slide into place over the rod. Each section has a 1 1/2-inch crown on top that mates with a recess in the bottom of the next section so they are aligned when stacked. The manufacturer recommends applying a sealant or mortar between the section joints during assembly. While there's no structural benefit to the sealant, it does help to keep damp soil—which can freeze and expand in cold temperatures—from collecting in the joints. This shouldn't be an issue in well-drained soils.

With the pier assembled, the post base can then be bolted to the end of the connecting rod, which must be cut to length. Before snugging up the nut and backfilling, though, make any final adjustments to the stack so that the post base

will be in the proper position relative to the framing. I found that I could shift the stack an inch or two in any direction to dial it in.

EZ-Tube piers can be installed with or without the base section. Once installed, the pier can handle virtually any deck load that you throw at it, with the limiting factor being the bearing capacity of the soil beneath (see chart, below).

Costs

My local yard sells EZ-Tubes by the piece and delivers the parts on a pallet that the driver unloads using a piggy-back fork truck. Provided there is good access, he's able to drive the pallet right to the deck location, and because the forklift has wide tires, there's no damage to the lawn.

The 12-inch-diameter column sections measure 12 inches high, but have a net height of 10 1/2 inches each when stacked. The net height of the base is 7 1/2 inches.

On the project shown in the photos, it took just a little longer to place the EZ-Tube piers than it would have to set up footing forms for cast-in-place footings. The total cost of installing a 49 1/2-inch-tall EZ-Tube ended up being a little higher than that of installing a standard cast-in-place pier with a plastic base and



EZ-Tube Load Capacity

Soil capacity	22-inch base	12-inch section
1,500 psf	3,960 lb.	1,178 lb.
2,000 psf	5,280 lb.	1,571 lb.
3,000 psf	7,919 lb.	2,356 lb.
4,000 psf	10,559 lb.	3,142 lb.

In poor soils, the optional base section can be added to an EZ-Tube pier to increase its bearing capacity. Load capacities are based on the compressive capacities of soil found in Table R401.4.1 in the 2015 IRC.



A. After inserting the galvanized connecting rod, the author lowers the 80-pound base section into position.

B. A plank laid across the footing hole provides a bit more control for placing the remaining 60-pound sections and prevents the sides of the hole from caving in.

C. A plumb bob or laser can be used to position the center of the base, but there's also some adjustability as the sections are being stacked. Here, the author checks the position of the connecting rod against his original layout.

D. Once the pier has been assembled, framing can begin immediately. The connecting rod doubles as the anchor for the post base.

round cardboard form with about the same capacity, though I saved about an hour per footing in labor. Here's how the costs broke down (with the assumption that digging and backfilling costs were about the same for each type of pier).

EZ-Tube cost: \$187 per footing.

- Materials: four EZ-Tube sections, one base, and galvanized rod = \$157
- Labor: 30 minutes (to move and place the sections) = \$30

Cast-in-place cost: \$138 per footing

- Materials: 2-inch footing form, one plastic footing-base form, rebar, concrete, and anchor bolt = \$48
- Labor: 1 hour 30 minutes (to mobilize equipment, move materials, place forms, and mix and place concrete) = \$90

Other Considerations

There are other considerations that may sway you toward EZ-Tubes. They're a good choice when temperatures are below freezing, for example, or if there's no water on the jobsite for mixing concrete or cleaning tools. In some cases, you may not want to wait a day or two to begin building on poured-in-place footings. If you're working in wet conditions, there's always a possibility that cardboard footing tubes will collapse or formed footing holes will get swamped while you're waiting for an inspection. And you don't need to worry about a pallet loaded with sacks of concrete mix getting wet; a pallet of EZ-Tubes doesn't need to be covered.

Finally, in some jurisdictions, you

need to wait several days for an inspection, which could delay deck construction if you're working with conventional footings. I expect that you could set the EZ-Tubes, but wait to backfill until after the deck is framed. Then you could schedule just one inspection for both the footings and framing.

Unfortunately, availability is limited. Right now EZ-Tubes are stocked only at some building-material dealers in New Jersey, New York, and the New England states, though I understand there are plans to expand distribution.

Mike Guertin is a custom home builder and remodeler in East Greenwich, R.I., and a regular presenter at DeckExpo and JLC Live.

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StoneBreaker Nailbender Work Gloves

Nailbender Gloves

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Price: \$20

by Andrew Wormer

Do you spend a lot of time and energy shopping for work gloves? Didn't think so. If you're like me, you grab whatever the lumberyard has on hand when your old ones wear out. But I've been pretty impressed with the StoneBreaker Nailbender gloves that I've been using for the last year. Made with leather palms and stretchy, breathable synthetic backs, the Nailbenders are different from other work gloves that I've tried in one important respect: They actually fit like a glove. Their articulated, double-stitched fingers are tough, yet bend naturally without bunching up at the knuckles, and the mesh back is a lot cooler in hot weather than leather. The fit is snug—so you don't have to pull the gloves off to do fine work—but not sweaty.

I've been just as impressed by their durability. While the Nailbenders are the lightest-duty gloves in StoneBreaker's Trades line (other models include the Journeyman, with extra padding in high-use areas, and the Demo, with additional reinforcing leather patches), they're still in perfect condition despite having been used to cut, split, and stack several cords of firewood and to move 2,400 board feet of rough-sawn pine. In cold weather, I even use them for driving. At \$20 a pair, they aren't the cheapest work gloves I've ever owned, but they are the best. ♦

Andrew Wormer is the editor of PDB.



After several months of use, the goatskin leather palms of the StoneBreaker Nailbender gloves show little wear.

Note the reinforced palms and the knuckle padding on these slightly more heavy-duty (and unused) Journeyman gloves.

