

## ASK THE BUILDER

## Thinking about a wood fence?

By Tim Carter

There are many things you need to consider as you start putting up a wood fence, not the least of which is whether you are even allowed to build the fence in the first place. Many cities and towns have strict zoning laws that control wood fencing, including its location, height and design. I used to live in a village that prohibited fences in front yards and strictly controlled the height of fences so that the vista across multiple properties was not blocked.

If you get the approval and permits necessary, the next issue you'll need to be concerned with are underground utilities. Electric, gas, water, phone and cable television lines can be lurking just below the surface of the soil where you intend to ram your post-hole digger. Call **811** from your phone to schedule an appointment from the service that marks the location of utilities.

To conserve natural resources as well as your time and money, I would recommend wood fence designs that allow you to build your fence in a modular fashion. This means using wood materials in such a way that you have minimal or no waste. I did this with my own wood fence many years ago.

I've had fantastic success over the years with treated pine fence posts. My current fence has treated-pine 4-by-4 posts that are 6 feet long. I was able to get two posts from each 12 foot long 4-by-4. These posts are buried 2 feet in the ground, so the top of the fence is 4 feet out of the ground. This 2:1 above/below ground ratio is a good one to adopt to ensure your fence withstands strong

wind gusts.

It's not a bad idea to pre-build your wood fence panels, but keep in mind the total weight of each panel and how you will connect it to your posts. If you intend to stain or paint your wood fence, you'll get the best long-term results if you pre-paint or stain each individual piece on all surfaces and cut edges before you assemble the parts.

There are two schools of thought on placing fence posts in concrete. Each argument is strong and has good points. In my own personal experience, I've never placed a fence post in concrete. I couldn't see any advantages, just disadvantages. The primary issue is that if the fence post needs to be replaced because of damage or rot, it's a major ordeal.

An alternative is crushed gravel. The sharp edges of the stone interlock and the stone mass mimics that of concrete, especially if the crushed stone comes with rock dust that fills the voids in between the stone.

Clay soil does a magnificent job of holding fence posts. That's what we have. My father-in-law grew up on a farm with livestock that used to bump the fences, and he said that they never used concrete to set fence posts.

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