

There are dozens of ways to build a wooden fence that looks right, lasts longer than a few seasons, and doesn't chew through your budget. The trick is understanding where the money actually goes, from the first utility locate ticket to the final brush of stain. I have managed projects where a tidy 120 foot backyard run stayed under 4,000 dollars, and others where the same footage crept past 9,000 because of terrain, gate packages, and neighbor disputes. The numbers change, but the anatomy of cost does not. Here is how to see the whole project clearly, line by line, so you can control it.

## **What you pay for and why it varies**

Fence budgets rise and fall on three levers: materials, labor, and conditions. Conditions include soil, grade, access, weather windows, permitting, and what is already in the ground. Those factors can swing the same design by 30 percent or more. Materials and labor are easier to forecast if you know the style, height, wood species, and how many gates you need.

Regional pricing matters. On the coasts, labor runs higher and some lumber sizes are scarce. In parts of the Midwest, treated pine might come in cheaper than cedar, but cold climates ask more of footings. A reputable fence contractor will ask about frost depth, HOA rules, and property lines before talking numbers. If a fence company skips those questions and pushes a flat price per foot, expect change orders later.

## **The core materials, with real ranges**

When people ask what a 6 foot privacy fence costs per linear foot, the safe answer, materials plus labor, is often 28 to 60 dollars in most suburbs. Break that into pieces and you see why.

Posts hold the whole thing together. For a 6 foot fence, you are usually looking at pressure treated pine or cedar, 4x4s or 5x5s, buried 24 to 36 inches depending on frost line and wind. Pressure treated 4x4s run 10 to 18 dollars each. Cedar posts can be 25 to 45 each. Many pros upsell 6x6 corner and gate posts for stiffness; those are 35 to 80 each. On tight lots with wind exposure, it is money well spent.

Rails span between posts. Two rails work on a 4 foot fence. For 6 foot privacy, three rails keep pickets flat over time. Rails are usually 2x4s, treated pine or cedar. Figure 2 to 5 dollars per rail foot. Multiply by the number of rails per bay and the number of bays.

Pickets set the look and most of the material cost. Dog ear and flat top are common. Treated pine pickets run 1.50 to 3.00 each for 5.5 inch widths. Cedar pickets are 2.75 to 5.50 each. Board on board privacy uses roughly 30 to 40 percent more pickets to close gaps as wood moves. Shadowbox, good neighbor, and horizontal styles all shift quantity and labor time.

Concrete and gravel hold posts true. A typical 80 pound bag of concrete is 5 to 7 dollars. Some crews pour wet, others set dry mix and let groundwater cure it. Either way, count 1.5 to 2 bags per post for a 10 inch diameter, 30 inch deep footing. In clay, bell the bottom and add gravel to prevent frost heave. In sandy loam, straight tubes are fine.

Fasteners and hardware make the difference at year five. Galvanized screws cost more up front than nails, but they reduce callbacks for pickets popping loose. Stainless where the fence touches irrigation overspray is cheap insurance. Expect 100 to 200 dollars for screws on a small yard, 300 to 600 for larger runs. Hinge and latch kits for gates vary from 35 to 180 depending on weight rating and self close features. If you plan to add a padlock, buy a latch that tolerates it cleanly instead of retrofitting.

Finishes add both protection and cost. Transparent sealers are 20 to 35 dollars per gallon, semi transparent stains 35 to 55, and solid color stains 45 to 70. Spray rigs or rollers, masking plastic, and prep time matter as much as the product. Staining a new 200 linear foot 6 foot fence is often a 600 to 1,600 add depending on color and whether you go both sides.

Expect 12 to 28 dollars per linear foot in raw materials for a typical 6 foot cedar or pine privacy fence with one standard gate. Stylish or heavy duty designs climb from there.

## **Labor, equipment, and the clock**

Labor either makes the job smooth or drags it out for days. A three person crew with an auger, saws, a compressor or cordless nailers, and a work truck can set 25 to 40 posts in a day on open ground. Add slope, roots, or rock and production can drop by half. Labor rates vary, but the total install for straightforward wood fence work often lands at 16 to 35 dollars per foot, more in high cost cities.

Equipment adds small but real charges. A two man gas auger is often included, but a skid steer with an auger attachment saves backs on long lines and charges by the day. Expect 200 to 400 per day for a small machine rental if your fence contractor does not own one. Nail and screw costs are modest, but blades, bits, and concrete tube forms show up on the invoice.

Weather risk is real money. Concrete needs time to grab. Heavy rain the day after post set can cause lean or frost lensing in cold snaps. Most fence installation services include a weather buffer in their timeline. If a crew rushes rails and pickets onto posts too quickly, you may get sagging gates or wavy lines later. Slower here is cheaper over the life of the fence.

## **Permits, HOAs, and property lines**

Some towns do not permit fences under a certain height as long as they are behind a front setback. Others require a permit and a final inspection for anything taller than 4 feet. Permit fees can be as low as zero or as high as 250. Plan time for the review. HOAs often add design rules: capped posts, maximum height, friendly side facing out. Violations cause expensive rework. A fence company that builds in your neighborhood knows these pitfalls and will ask for your plat and HOA covenants up front.

Never skip the utility locate. In most states, the call is free and required. Irrigation lines are private and do not get marked, so expect a few repairs. Budget 100 to 300 to patch broken sprinkler lines on older yards with undocumented runs. That is normal, not a sign of rough work.

## **Demolition and disposal**

Tearing out a rotten fence always looks simpler than it is. Older posts usually bring concrete footings with them. Disposal costs vary by region and volume. A 120 foot fence with posts and pickets can fill a small trailer twice. Dump fees might be 80 to 200 per load. If you have metal panels or chain link to remove before wood fence installation, cutting and hauling time increases. A fair allowance for demo and disposal on a modest yard is 400 to 1,200.

## **Gates, the honest budget buster**

Gates eat more time than straight runs. A single 3 or 4 foot walk gate is standard, framed with 2x4s, diagonal brace, two strap hinges, and a latch. Materials can be 120 to 250, labor another 150 to 300. Double drive gates

wide enough for a mower or trailer need stronger posts, heavier hinges, and often a center drop rod. Expect 450 to 1,200 per double gate depending on width and hardware. On slopes, plan extra for a wheel or custom cut to keep the bottom gap tight.

If you want hidden steel frame gates that resist sag for a decade, factor 350 to 700 more per opening. That is a luxury on some projects and a necessity on others, such as long span horizontal designs.

## Style choices that move the needle

Horizontal fences have become popular because they look clean and modern. They also ask for tighter framing to avoid oil canning and sag. You will likely need 2x6 rails or closer post spacing, driving both materials and labor over a classic dog ear vertical build. Likewise, board on board privacy is rock solid for privacy as boards shrink, but it uses more lumber and weighs more, so posts and hinges must match.

Accent trims, cap and trim tops, and decorative post caps add finish. Budget 5 to 12 more per foot for a cap and trim look if you want that crisp edge line and water shedding top.

## Terrain, trees, and tricky lines

Flat, open ground is cheap. Hills, trees, and crumbling old footings are not. A slope means you choose between stepping panels, which creates level sections with small drops at each post, or racking, where pickets follow the grade and rails angle. Racking takes more layout care. Stepping needs more cuts at the bottom to avoid toe spaces and a wavy look. Neither is wrong, but both add labor compared to a flat yard.

Roots from mature trees can force post shifts or partial hand digging. If a post must sit close to a trunk, your crew has to finesse the hole and may need to concrete around roots without killing the tree. That is slow work. Retaining walls complicate matters further. Attaching a fence to a wall invites structural and liability questions. Independent posts just behind the wall with deeper footings is safer. These calls are where experienced fence installation services pay for themselves.

## From first phone call to final stain, how the costs stack

- Site visit and design: measurements, style options, permitting check, utility locate scheduling. Usually free, sometimes 50 to 150 credited to the job.
- Mobilization and layout: crew, tools, string lines, property line confirmation. Often built into labor, roughly 200 to 400 in real cost.
- Post setting: holes, gravel, concrete, plumb and brace. Labor plus materials typically 10 to 18 per foot on a 6 foot fence.
- Framing and pickets: rails, fastening, gates built in place. Another 14 to 28 per foot depending on style and wood species.
- Finish and cleanup: stain or sealer, haul off, touch ups. Zero if you defer staining, up to 8 per foot if you stain both sides.

Those ranges assume straightforward ground, one or two gates, and no expensive surprises underground. Add-ons like custom lattice tops, steel gate frames, or extra demo pull you toward the top.

## DIY vs hiring a pro: what changes on the ledger

You can build a solid wood fence yourself if you have the time, a few strong friends, and patience for layout. On a 150 foot run, expect two weekends for a small team. You will save most of the labor line, which might be 2,500 to 4,500. You will spend on tools: a two man auger rental, saw blades, a compressor or cordless nailers, levels, and bracing lumber. Plan 300 to 800 in tool and rental costs if you do not already own them.

Mistakes are the hidden DIY cost. Misplaced property lines, shallow posts that heave, and gates that drag in August are common. If you need a clean, straight line facing a neighbor with strong opinions, a pro crew is rarely more expensive in the long run. Look for a fence contractor who shows you post spacing decisions, explains why they choose certain fasteners, and writes down gate widths and swing directions on the contract.

## When a commercial fence company may be the better fit

Residential and commercial work overlap, but they are not the same. A commercial fence company thinks in terms of security lines, vehicle access, bollards, and long gate cycles. If your project includes a wide drive gate, keypad or magnetic latches, or a mix of wood and steel on a sloped frontage, get bids from at least one commercial oriented shop. Their labor rate may be higher, but their hardware packages and weld quality often outlast the budget route. For small backyard fences, a residential fence company is usually perfect and more cost efficient.

## The long tail: maintenance, repairs, and true lifespan cost

Wood moves. Sun and water beat finishes. Sprinklers stain low boards and hardware. Plan a sealer or stain within 4 to 8 weeks of install once the wood moisture content drops. Recoat cycles vary by climate and product. In full sun with sprinklers, you may want to touch up every 2 to 3 years. In shade with light exposure, 4 to 5 years is common. Annual costs spread over a decade often average 0.50 to 1.25 per foot per year if you keep up with it.

Fence repair shows up in small bites. A dog that leans on one panel, a delivery truck that clips a post, or a gate latch that freezes in winter. A single panel repair can be 150 to 350. A gate rehanging might be 90 to 250. Budget a small reserve each year and you will never feel it. If you neglect finish and hardware, you will feel it all at once around year seven.

Sometimes clients ask about vinyl fence installation to avoid maintenance. Vinyl costs more per foot up front, often 40 to 80 installed, but you skip staining and most rot [fence panel repair](#) risk. Vinyl fence repair can be either simple, if a panel pops free, or expensive if a single broken picket forces a new section because the profiles are discontinued. Wood is easier to patch invisibly, vinyl looks new for longer if left alone. Both have their place. If you are on the fence, ask to see aging examples in your area before you decide.

## Regional examples to anchor expectations

In a temperate suburb with mild frost, a 100 foot, 6 foot board on board cedar fence with one 4 foot walk gate typically lands like this with a reputable fence company:

- Materials: 1,600 to 2,600
- Labor: 2,000 to 3,200
- Gate hardware upgrade: 80 to 180
- Permit: 0 to 150
- Demo and haul off of an old fence: 500 to 800
- Stain, both sides, semi transparent: 700 to 1,200

Total: roughly 4,900 to 8,100.

Outside a mountain town with rock, frost at 36 inches, and a steep side yard, the same footage could jump:

- Materials: 1,900 to 3,100, because you will want heavier posts and more concrete
- Labor: 3,000 to 4,800, slope and digging slow everything
- Equipment rental: 250 to 400 for a skid steer auger day
- Permit: 100 to 250
- Demo: 700 to 1,200
- Stain: 800 to 1,400

Total: roughly 6,750 to 11,150.

These are not worst case scenarios. They are honest pictures of how ground and climate matter.

## **Subcontracting, insurance, and what a good quote includes**

Many fence companies use subcontract crews during peak season. That is not a red flag by itself. The questions to ask are simple. Who pulls the permit and schedules inspections. Who carries liability insurance. Who handles warranty work and how quickly. A clean, detailed quote lists post size and depth, spacing, number of rails, picket species and thickness, gate widths, hardware models, and finish choices. It should also define rock clauses, sprinkler repair allowances, and how property lines will be confirmed. If you only see a per foot number without these details, ask for a revision.

## **Small choices that pay off over time**

Spend on posts and gates. Those are the heart and hinge of the fence. If you want to economize, select treated pine rails with cedar pickets rather than cedar everything. Use stainless screws near sprinklers and galvanized elsewhere. Keep post spacing tight at 6 to 7 feet on horizontal fences to avoid sag. If you share a line with a neighbor, a good neighbor or shadowbox style costs a bit more but can keep the peace because both sides look finished.

If you want privacy now, consider a staggered board on board pattern. You burn more lumber on day one, but you do not wake up in six months with new gaps between pickets as they dry.

## **A quick way to keep control of the budget**

- Measure twice, price once: draw a rough plan with lengths, slopes, and gate swings, then ask for line item pricing.
- Decide style early: vertical dog ear privacy costs less to build right than horizontal or cap and trim.
- Group gates: more than two gates add disproportionate cost; combine where you can.
- Choose the right wood: treated pine structure with cedar pickets gives a warm look for less than full cedar.
- Plan finish: stain or seal on a schedule to avoid large repair bills later.

## **What can go wrong and what to do about it**

The most common blowups on fence jobs happen before a single hole is dug. Property lines get guessed, setbacks from sidewalks get ignored, and a neighbor who thought they were being consulted suddenly sees posts. If you are building on a shared line, get an email agreement about style and cost share. Even if the neighbor pays nothing, the conversation costs you nothing and can save a lot.

After install, the calls I make most often are about gates sagging or posts heaving. The causes are usually simple. The crew rushed rails onto green concrete or the holes were shallow in a freeze climate. Fixes range from rehanging with an anti sag kit to resetting a post properly. Both eat time and goodwill. Choosing a crew that explains their set times and depth standards reduces those headaches.

Occasionally, clients compare wood to metal or vinyl after the fact. A wood fence has a smell when it rains and a texture that changes through the year. It also needs care. Vinyl stands still. If you hire a fence installation services provider that builds all three, ask to visit two or three older installs. Seeing a five year old fence on your street will tell you more than any brochure.

## **The finish line: cleanup, walkthrough, and paperwork**

At the end, your yard should look like a jobsite was never there. That means metal cutoffs and screws picked up with a magnet sweep, leftover concrete bags gone, and dirt raked smooth. You should get a walkthrough where the crew tests each gate with you and shows latch and lock operation. If you paid for stain, ask to see the product label and leftover for touch ups. Keep your invoice and any written warranty. A respectable fence contractor stands by a one year workmanship warranty at minimum, with longer on gate frames or steel inserts.

If you plan to sell your home soon, take before and after photos and keep permits and inspection records. Buyers like proof that fences are on the right lines and built to code.

## **A brief word on mixing materials**

Wood pairs well with steel posts where wind and soil demand it. You can sleeve steel with wood wraps to keep the look warm. It costs more initially, maybe 8 to 15 per foot extra, but it can prevent the tilting and rot issues common in wet corners of a yard. For clients curious about long term ownership cost, a hybrid steel post with wood infill fence is a smart middle ground. If you are considering vinyl fence installation along a side yard and wood across the back, a good fence company can align heights and colors so the yard reads as one design.

## **Final thought on value**

A fence is a working piece of your property. It holds dogs, blocks wind, frames landscaping, and sets a line between households. Money spent on structure and layout pays back every season you do not have to call for fence repair. If you sort the costs into their simple pieces and ask the right questions early, you will get a straight fence, swing a gate with one finger, and know exactly where every dollar went.