

Consumer's Guide to Backyard Fencing

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FENCE BUYING GUIDE

Thanks for taking the time to download our Fence Buying Guide. We have worked with thousands of customers over the past 30 years, and we're pretty familiar with the questions that most folks have when considering the purchase of a residential fence.

Ashleigh and I have tried to answer, in as concise a language as possible, the following questions:

1. How Do I Find the Right Fence for Me?
2. Gates: How Important are Gates?
3. Which Fence Material Options Should I Consider?
4. What Type of Fence do I need for my Pool?
5. How Do I Find a Reputable Fence Contractor?
6. How Can I Insure I'm Getting a Fair Price?

It's our hope that the following information will empower you to make an informed decision regarding the investment you're about to make. Before we dive into these questions, it's critical to understand important distinctions about the four main materials used in residential fencing:

1. **Aluminum Fencing** is a manufactured *maintenance free* product.
2. **Premium Vinyl Fencing** is a manufactured *maintenance free* product.
3. **Natural Wood Fencing**, outside in the lumber will warp, split, or crack and it will *require high maintenance* such as yearly staining, sanding, replacement of posts, rails, and boards.
4. **Wrought Iron Fencing** is welded steel, a manufactured product with *high maintenance* due to rusting, (yearly sanding, priming, painting).

Regardless of the fencing materials described above of your fence, the **structural integrity** of your fence depends on:

- a. *solid foundation*, the *strength of your posts* and the *depth the posts* are placed in the ground, and securing the posts in real concrete
- b. *support rails*: the *number of rails*, *rail strength*, *rail span length*

Once you have established a solid foundation, then your option of closing in the fencing with pickets is up to you.

1: How Do I Find the Right Fence for Me?

How can I combine curb appeal and function?

Curb Appeal & Functionality - consider your purpose in having a fence. Are you simply trying to contain your children and pets, or are you defining your property? You may need a fence that is simple and elegant black aluminum defining property lines, or a fence that runs close to the ground in order to contain your pet, or privacy from neighbors.

However, you may be inclined to opt for an elegant design because you are focusing on increasing the value of your home.

The Premium Vinyl Fencing below is a small decorative fence accenting the landscape bordering the field for a nice attractive backdrop. Many options that used to be natural wood only are available in maintenance free vinyl fencing.



Am I restricted by a HOA as to fence materials and styling?

***Home Owner's Association
Rules & Regulations***

1. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
2. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
3. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
4. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Checking with the Home Owners Association if there is one, will further define your potential fencing options and required accessories (brick columns, layout of fencing, height of fencing, distance from property lines ...). You need to check on your HOA restrictions. Some HOA's require a 5' setback off the property lines for fencing. You may be required to install brick or stone columns every 35' to 50' and match the existing home brick and mortar color.

For natural wood fencing, some HOA's will require the fence stained with one of their *approved* stain colors. They may also require landscape gates and access panels to the property.

You should get a new homeowner packet when you move in so you can familiarize yourself with the HOA and restrictions.

What are the existing architectural themes of my home and landscape?

There are many different styles and options to choose from the different materials of vinyl, aluminum, wrought iron, and wood for residential fencing. You will need to think about spacing of pickets, height, privacy, and spacing from the base to the ground.

Need help finding the right fence for you? Check out our [Aluminum Fence photos page](#), [Vinyl Fence photos page](#), [Natural Wood Fence photos page](#), or if you live in Knoxville and would like our input see our [CONTACT US](#) and drop us an email or phone call. We'd be glad to help.

2: Gate Location and Size: How Important Is It...Really? YES VERY!!

This is probably the most critical part of your fence, the only moving part that is actually constantly used once construction is finished. Gates also *compromise 70% of all fencing service calls*, so special emphasis is placed on gates and gate construction! Many customers have questions about the size and location of their gate.

POINT OF ENTRY GATE



SEQUOYA POOL GATE – POINT OF ENTRY

I like to call the *main gate* the Point of Entry Gate. This is the one most people end up using, the gate you direct visitors thru, located at the end of the driveway. This is a high usage, high wear, main entry gate.

We like to make this gate a little more decorative since it is the *MAIN*

PEDESTRIAN GATE. Special decorative effort is made to draw attention to this gate for your point of entry (landscaping planters, arbor cover, sidewalk pavers).

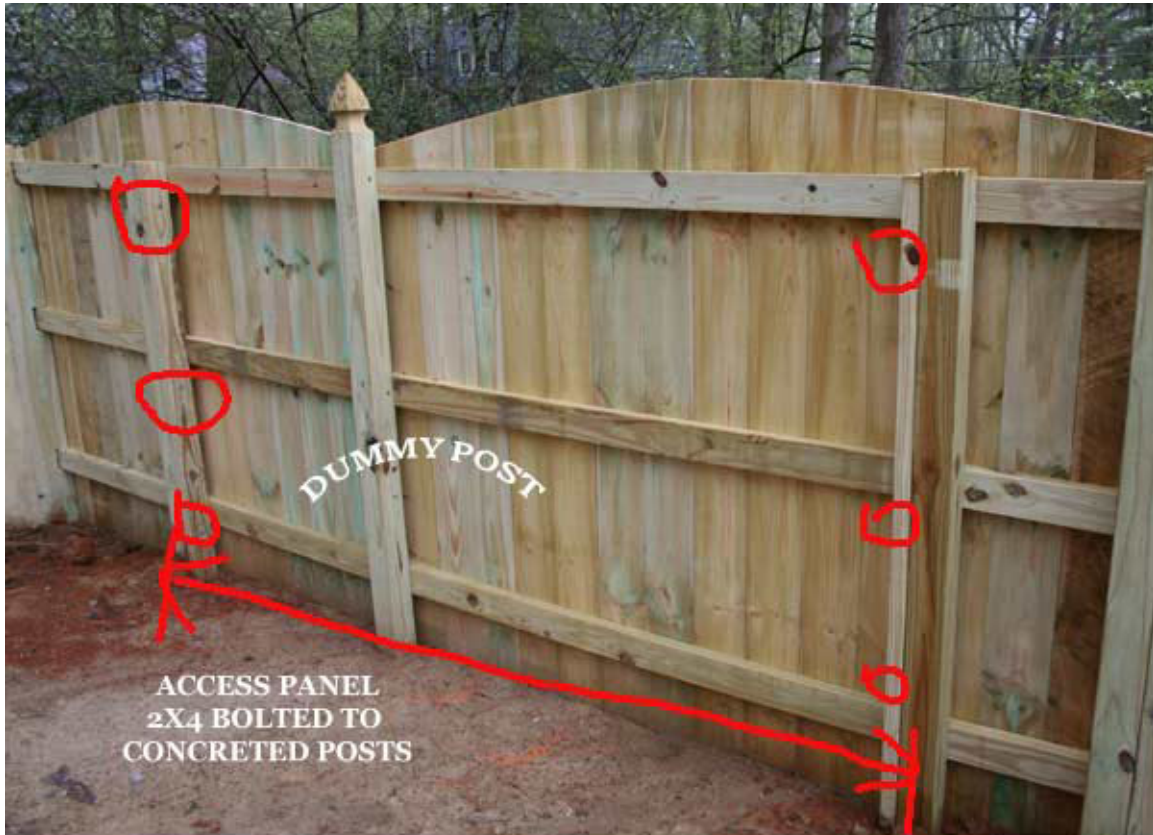
ACCESS GATE/LANDSCAPER GATE



LANDSCAPE GATE - WHITTINGTON CREEK – ALUMINUM PUPPY RAIL

You will most likely want at least one gate that is about 5' wide so that landscapers and large lawn mowers can enter into your fenced yard. This access gate is not decorative and should match in with the existing fencing. Even if you cut your own grass and do not need a larger gate now, you may need one in the future and most larger gates are only \$25 to \$50 more than a regular gate (during fence construction). Some customers like to include a second gate that may so that they have access on both sides of the house.

ACCESS PANEL



We like to recommend including a removable *ACCESS PANEL* that is approximately 8' to 10' opening that can be removed in the case you decide to install a pool, landscape, trim trees, or have any other need to bring a truck or equipment into your fenced area. This is for infrequent usage, for more frequent use for trucks, trailers, or boats see the double drive gate is recommended.

ESTATE DRIVE Thru GATE



This is a double panel gate for vehicle access, boat, trailers, and large equipment. We like to set drop rods on BOTH gate panels for extra stability and security along with the other gate hardware. The double gate above is a decorative aluminum estate gate with gently sloping curves.

3: Which Fence Material Options Should I Consider?

Vinyl vs. Aluminum vs. Wood vs. Wrought Iron

Wondering what type of fence to buy? Let's do a little comparison research! Below is a table that shows pros and cons of each type of fencing on a scale of 1 to 5.

The least expensive fencing in initial costs will be the Natural Wood Fencing, however it is also the most expensive when factoring in the maintenance costs and return on investment over a 10 year period.

The Wrought Iron Fencing is the most expensive in initial cost, and remains that way with the maintenance cost of sanding off rust, priming and repainting. It has a middle ground of about 35% ROI with proper maintenance after a 10 year period.

Surprisingly enough, the least expensive fencing materials are the maintenance free aluminum and vinyl fencing. Initially higher cost than wood, with no maintenance costs, the 10 year ROI on both are a whopping 65%! This works out to a less expensive fence over the long haul!

SWIMMING POOL FENCING AND GATES - MATERIALS COMPARISON					
	Natural Wood Fencing	Wrought Iron Fencing	Aluminum Fencing	Vinyl Picket Fencing	Vinyl Privacy Fencing
Attractive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Security	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Privacy	Yes	NO	NO	NO	Yes
Gates - for purpose intended	Use other	Use Other	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maintenance Issues	HIGH	HIGH	NA	NA	NA
10 YR Return on Investment (ROI)	10%	35%	65%	65%	65%
SCORING	3	2	5	5	5
Well maintained Natural Wood Fencing will double original cost of fence in 10 years with ROI of 10%.					
Well maintained Ornamental Wrought Iron will triple original cost of fence in 10 years with ROI of 35%.					
Aluminum Maintenance Free Fencing incurs no addition costs with average 10 yr ROI of 65%.					
Vinyl Maintenance Free Fencing incurs no additional costs with average 10 yr ROI of 65%					

VINYL FENCING

VINYL FENCING ADVANTAGES:

Return on Investment: this is one of my key focal points when considering a big ticket



purchase. Quality premium vinyl fencing, correctly installed has *about 65% return on investment* when selling a house. Compare with wood fencing that has not been maintained at about 10% or less return on investment. I know everyone has good intentions to maintain the wood fence appearance by staining and replacing warped boards, boards with knots out of them, but check out any subdivision with wood fencing and see what it looks like after a few years...gray to black coloring, posts decaying and fence lines leaning over, picket boards broken or missing, gates sagging or just hanging there...

Low Maintenance: This is an excellent product that is not going to require sanding or staining that you will get with a wood fence. [Vinyl fencing is IMPERVIOUS to the #1 fencing problem in East Tennessee, Subterranean Termites](#). Also, vinyl does not warp or twist which is a natural process of wood and is not covered under warranty. Vinyl is easy to clean with a little bit of soap and pressure washing it will look as good as the day you had it installed.

Speed of Installation: Depending on the style of your vinyl fence installation usually takes one to three days. Picket fence installation is especially quick since it is prebuilt at the shop and then delivered in panels to the job site.

Durability: Vinyl is a strong material that can withstand a great deal of weathering without losing its attractive qualities.

Customizable Options: With our *cutting edge technology* at *Bryant's Southern Fence and Rail* we are able to customize your vinyl fence. An example of this would be creating a fence with 1" spacing to keep your new precious lap dog safe and sound inside the fence, or an eight foot high *reinforced* vinyl privacy fence.

VINYL FENCING DISADVANTAGES:

Low Initial Cost: The up front cost of vinyl is more expensive than wood. You should consider that keeping the fresh look of a wood fence is impossible since it is a material that once was living and now is decomposing. You can try and preserve the wood material using stains, but a stained fence will still only look nice for about 2 years. Now you have to include the effort and money spent on staining over that time period and you end up with a slightly higher price per foot for vinyl.

ALUMINUM FENCING

ALUMINUM FENCING ADVANTAGES:

Return on Investment: Like the vinyl fencing, Black Aluminum Picket Fencing correctly installed has *about a 65% return on investment* when selling your home. Black Aluminum Fencing resembles the beautiful Black Wrought Iron Fencing but without the tremendous maintenance. Elegant fencing to complement your home and landscaping looks great when correctly installed, doesn't need painting, doesn't warp or splinter. It comes in heights from 4' to 6' with picket spacing 4" to 1-1/2" apart and also Puppy Rail Fencing. Aluminum fencing still looks great years after being installed, and most aluminum fencing has a lifetime paint warranty.



Low Maintenance: Aluminum fencing is a low maintenance fence that is *not subject to rust, crack, or peel, is impervious to termites*. It can be easily cleaned with soap and water to look as fresh as the day it was installed.

Speed of Installation: Aluminum fences are installed quickly because they are built in panels of the style that you choose. Our install crews are experts at installing aluminum fences! We keep our 2 most popular styles in stock at our warehouse for quick installations and also special order aluminum fencing and aluminum gates through Hudson, Elite, Delgard, Jerith to name a few manufacturing companies. Special order fencing may delay installation scheduling due to manufacturing delivery lead times.

Durability: Aluminum fences are durable against weather conditions and hold up over a long period of time. You can also purchase aluminum fencing in residential or commercial grade. Most of our aluminum fencing styles come with a lifetime paint warranty. Aluminum is a great choice if you are hoping to keep an open view, airy feel in your backyard. It allows you to maintain a connection with the environment around you with the subtle thin aluminum panels and spacing.

ALUMINUM FENCING DISADVANTAGES:

Low Initial Cost: Aluminum fencing is more expensive than purchasing a wood fence, but ultimately is a better value. Over approximately 10 years you are going to end up with about the same price per foot between vinyl, aluminum, and wood when you consider up keep and possibly replacing a wood fence. Also, consider the style of fence which is most comparable to a wrought iron fence, without the maintenance issues of wrought iron. In this case, an aluminum fence is a much better value even in the short term.

WOOD FENCING

WOOD FENCING ADVANTAGES:



Wood Fencing: has the warmth and beauty of a natural product. It is a highly popular fencing material for just that reason. Wood fencing is also one of the least expensive options for fencing in your backyard.

Speed of Installation: Wood fencing installs quickly in a couple of days.

Low Initial Cost: Wood fencing is the least expensive fencing material discussed on initial installation. It does require regular maintenance to keep its appearance including yearly staining, pickets and parts replacements.

Durability: Depending on the type of wood used and whether or not it has been treated for subterranean termites, it can be quite durable.

WOOD FENCING DISADVANTAGES:

Return On Investment in wood fencing is very low at best. If you do all the required maintenance on wood fencing in short order you reach break cost, even with the more expensive vinyl or aluminum fencing.

High Maintenance: Wood fencing will require yearly pressure washing and staining to maintain its appearance, periodically replacement of boards as needed, for non treated wood (cedar) expect to replace termite damaged posts within 5 years of installation.

WROUGHT IRON FENCING:

Strength of Fencing: This fencing by far is the strongest security fencing discussed here.

Return on Investment: Poor return on investment, with high maintenance demands, usually requires intensive maintenance.

Speed of Installation: Slow - installation takes about 2 to 3 times that of other fencing due to on site welding of sections to posts, then cleaning welds, priming welds, painting welds.

High Maintenance: constant attention to rust is the main area of concern. If your parents ever had the old wrought iron front porch railings you will remember the railing wobbly where it rusts out in the concrete and the paint peels and the metal rusts thru. Finding and paying people to do this type of sanding, priming, and repainting is main issue of maintenance. If you choose this beautiful, elegant, strong fencing be prepared for high maintenance time and money to keep that gorgeous look.

4: What Type of Fence Do I Need for My Pool?

The #1 OBJECTIVE OF SWIMMING POOL SAFETY CODES IS TO PREVENT CHILD DROWNINGS.

While there are other important building code rules this is the most important. Common sense should prevail, and always err on the conservative side.

*Secure fencing and gates around swimming pools is only one part of a total secure child safety program for your swimming pool area. While swimming pool building code correct fencing and self closing, latching gates can minimize access to your swimming pool by securing the outer perimeter, you also need to apply **ALL recommended strategies to make your pool as safe as possible.***



It is important to seek out your city or county authorities, swimming pool building code requirements, and discuss with your home owners insurance agency to insure compliance for your swimming pool safety.

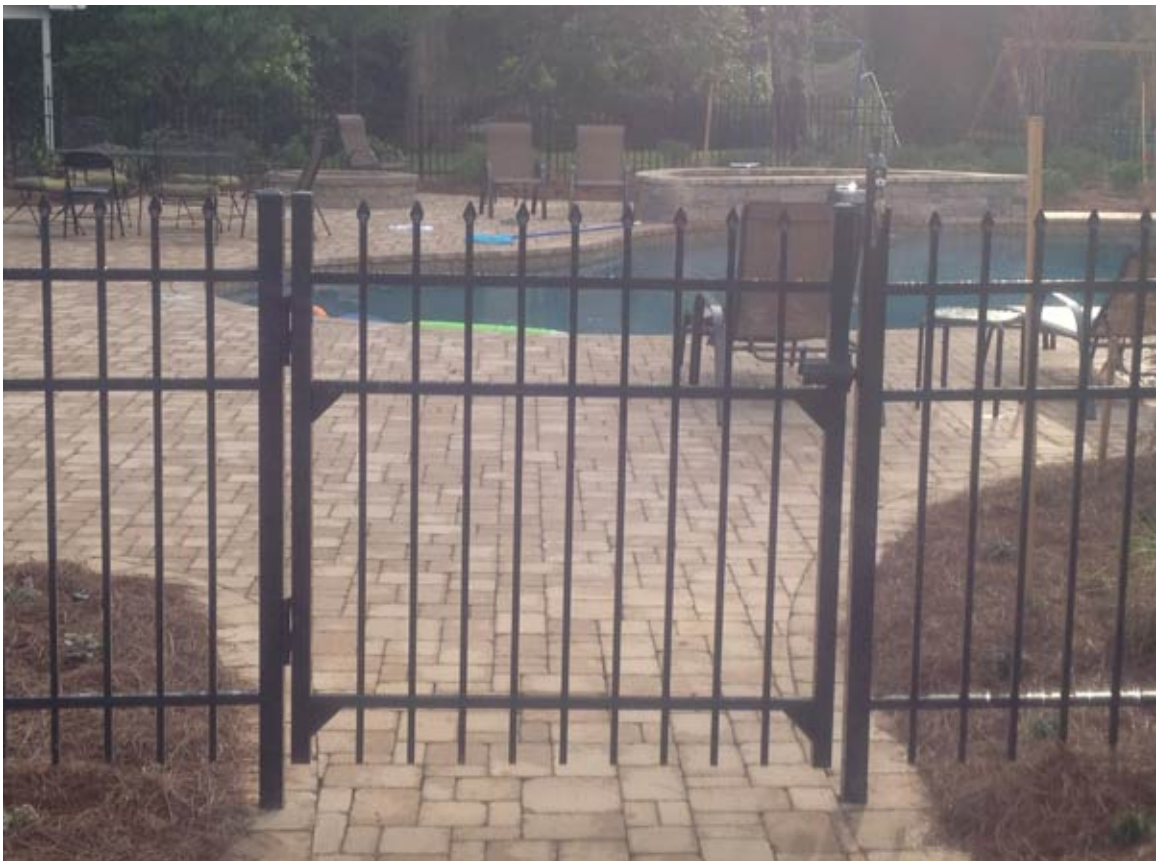
We recommend only vinyl and aluminum fencing for swimming pool fencing:

- no maintenance product
- will meet all code requirements
- gates if properly installed and not abused will continue to operate correctly for many years before adjusting.

Wood fencing and gates are heavy, the natural drying out process creates warping, causing gates to not latch properly over time.

Wrought iron gates while stable and do not warp, they are very heavy making it difficult for self closing hinges to operate and close properly.

Remember, the *#1 OBJECTIVE OF SWIMMING POOL GATES IS TO PREVENT SMALL CHILDREN ACCESS TO A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATION!*



5: How Do I Find A Reputable Fence Contractor?

This may be the most important section of the buying guide. Why? The contractor you entrust your backyard to install a fence will make or break your fence installation. Over the past decade, we have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly in the fence industry. All of our experience regarding contractors can be summed up in these two statements:

A great contractor can install construction, and he will stand behind it if it fails.

A poor contractor can completely make a mess, and will leave you abandoned to fend for yourself.

Many fence businesses pop up for a few months or maybe a year or two, changing names every few years, and then close down. Most of these businesses don't carry workman's compensation insurance or liability insurance. You don't have to look hard on the internet to find horror story after horror story about shady construction contractors. This is a blemish on the face of our industry, and why this is **clearly your biggest decision** as a consumer.

Before going into how to find the right fence installation company, I want to discuss two reasons people often choose the wrong fence company:

Pricing and Installation Time

Do your due diligence in finding the **best company** rather than simply go with the *cheapest price* or *quickest installation time*. Yes, these are two factors that should be considered.

You certainly don't want to be gouged from a price standpoint, and you certainly don't want to wait for months to have your fencing installed. **Hasty decisions lead to regret** and I personally wouldn't feel like spending \$3,000 to \$10,000 to end up with regret. A few short tasks can help insure you've found **your perfect contractor** and protect you against buyer's remorse.

3 Step Process For Finding a Reputable Fence Company:

Step One: Determine Contractors Level of Experience, Stability, and Insurance

Based on my experience of 30 years in this industry I have found the following to be true:

Knoxville has about 40 fence companies listed yearly in the phone book.

Of these 40 fence companies, on average 20 are new companies

Of these 20 are new fence companies (company name changed, fresh start up,

company is closed with phone # still listed, they may be out of work house framers, working out of pickup truck, working with only cell phone).

2 of 5 Fence companies fail within their first year

3 of 5 are gone after 3 years

4 of 5 are gone after 5 years

The first thing you need to check, when it comes to finding a credible fence company, is how long they've been operating under their **current business name** (not derivatives of same name...*creditor's watch*). I make this distinction about the current name because it's common for many unsuccessful fence companies to run up large advertising bills and large unpaid accounts, and to leave customers high and dry, only to go out of business, re-surfacing under the guise of another company. More than 5 years in business, especially considering the economic events that have unfolded over the past 3 years, equals a *pretty good sign of stability*.

Another question, do they have a **physical place of business**? A contractor working out of a garage or pick-up truck doesn't exactly exude stability. A **company owned and not just rented**, physical location with offices, employees, fence materials yard, inventory, and trucks is a good sign that your company is there to stay. A fence company with rental offices may be fine, but then again if problems arise, its very easy to close the doors and move to another location with a new company name.

Do they have an **actual office and telephone** or do they **operate with only a cell phone**? Cell phones are a great asset to any organization. However, if your fence company only has a cell phone for you to contact them with, it's very easy for the contractor to skip town leaving you with a mess of problems.

Make sure that your contractor has workers compensation coverage on **HIS workers, employees and subcontractors**, and that it is **current coverage**! I have been a fencing contractor for over 30 years and no matter how safe you are, accidents and injuries happen! It is not **IF** someone will get injured on the job but **WHEN** will a worker get injured. If your contractor is not current with his work comp policy or is scamming the policy by using uninsured subs or declaring "all workers corporate board members" and therefore not covered, remember this. If someone is hurt on your property, and the company closes down, skips town, whatever, the claim will follow the money (**YOU AND YOUR HOME OWNER'S POLICY**).

Step Two: The Interview

Once you've established that the company has been around for some time, it's a good idea to have a conversation directly with them, either on the phone or in person.

How many fences (**the one you like**) have you installed?

This will give you a good idea of their experience. Many fence companies will only install chain link and wood fencing, with no experience in aluminum or wood installations. Their advertising is confusing since it shows photos of all these fences. Just because their ads show the photos doesn't mean that they are experienced in your particular project. No one wants to be the test fence!!!

Do you work with any major manufacturers?

A company that works with major manufacturers means that they meet certain standards regarding *professionalism and product knowledge*. They are also provided *product training, seminars, and technical support*.

Do you have any **references** that I can contact?

The company should be able to provide you with references. Preferably you will be able to receive several references with your specific *style of fence*.

Have you **ever made a mistake**? If you have been in business for a while then you have made mistakes! Admitting your mistakes and how you handled the mistakes with your customer says a lot about your company.

What was the biggest mistake you have made?

How do you handle mistakes?

If they do not have an answer, you may be concerned...they may not have enough experience. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. It's how they handle the mistake that counts.

Does your **company have workman's compensation and liability insurance**?

You want a company that carries their own workman's compensation and liability insurance. This will protect you (the homeowner) from any incidents that may happen to workers on the job.

Some contractors will **skirt the law by declaring laborers as members of the board** or using uninsured subcontractors. Do the men below look like your fence company CORPORATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS?!



This does not release you or them from responsibility of injury. If the contractor goes belly up, doesn't carry work comp insurance, or scams out of the insurance: when a claim is issued they will go after the money, if not the contractor then you (your homeowners insurance).

Have you ever had a fence material arrive on your site damaged? How did you handle it?

If they've done enough fences, they have had a material show up in less than ideal condition. The response you want is that they ***immediately notified the customer*** and ***discussed various options*** with them; rather than simply installing the fence and hoping they didn't notice. (Yes, on occasion we have had materials arrive damaged. We immediately notify the customers and come to a happy resolution.)

Step Three: Driving by Fence Installations & Calling References

This can be a bit time consuming, but you're about to make at least a *few thousand dollars investment*.

Here's what you want to do:

- **Call customers** with products as similar to yours as possible. If you're considering a *vinyl privacy fence* for example, call someone with a *vinyl privacy fence*.
- When **speaking with the references** ask what impressed them the most and least about the contractor. Ask if they would change anything if they had to do it over again.
- **Drive by homes** that have had similar fencing installed as the one that you are buying. Drive by current jobs and also some older installations to see how the fencing is holding up over time. After all if you live in a home for 10 years, you don't want a fence that falls down in year 7 and has to be replaced!

6: How Can I Insure I'm getting a Fair Price?

So this fence buyers guide will be literally read by fencing customers from all over the world, so there is no way to have a discussion about whether any particular price of fencing is "*fair*".

So what I would like to do is to discuss how you can protect yourself from "hidden and inflated costs" which unfortunately is not uncommon in the fencing industry.

Common Hidden and Inflated Costs

Are you quoted for a complete fence installation job or just fence erection?

Is your per foot installed fencing cost low and the footage padded?

If an old fence is removed is there additional charges for disposal?

Tree and brush removal from the property?

If HOA requires brick columns that are not included in contract, who will build and at what cost?

Is clean up of materials and trash included?

Who is responsible for dirt displaced by setting posts in concrete, where does the dirt go?

Who is responsible for repairing broken irrigation lines, and what is the cost?

Most fence contractors will have a rock clause in their contract for additional money if incurring jack hammers or other equipment not normally used on job site.

How to Avoid Hidden Costs:

1: The Salesperson's Quote Sheet

This should disclose all potential costs and clearly specify what is and is not included in the fence installation. For example, we mark (check off) all the things we will include in the fence installation service on the quote sheet. Plus, we also make a point to completely discuss the quote sheet in the buying process. A quote sheet is not a contract, beware of any contractor whose paperwork (QUOTE) magically becomes a contract when signed by home owner.

Your contract should reflect the quote sheet or refer specifically to the quote sheet, also spell out total cost, deposit, when balance is due.

2: Don't Start the Project Until All Cost are Known

Some fencing contractors are famous for closing the contract and adding additional work costs as add on costs, or change work orders after the contract is signed. These guys are more concerned with "*closing the deal*" than their customer staying within a specific budget. Be specific and get everything to be done in writing!

3: Ask, "What other Potential Costs Are There?"

There are always unknowns going into any project. Rock could be hit during digging of post holes example, and there's a chance that could cost you more money. Please don't rely on the builder to share potential costs to you. Be proactive and *simply ask* them.

Final Thoughts to Leave You With

After reviewing all the information above and when making a final decision on whom to do business with you should be completely at ease with your sales rep. If for any reason (even just a quirky, gut reaction) you are uncomfortable take a step back and think about your decision.

You should understand every aspect of your project completely. If you do not understand something, have it explained, and if not to your satisfaction, back up and take a breather (couple of days to think about it).

Hopefully you've found this Consumer Guide to Backyard Fencing helpful in your quest to find the perfect fence for your home and family. Now that you're well on your way, you might want to check out some of the other content on our website:

[**Aluminum Fence Costs**](#) (Photos) fencing styles and gates.

[**Vinyl Fence Costs**](#) (Photos) fencing styles and gates.

[**Wood Fence Costs**](#) (Photos) fencing styles and gates.

[**Fence School 101**](#) (answers to the most popular fencing questions, cost, materials, installations, HOA's, finding contractors)

Or you may want to [**Request a FREE Fence Estimate**](#) or [**Request a Service Call**](#) (East Tennessee area only).

Thanks and good luck with your new fence!