

21 Critical Questions to get Answers to Before Purchasing a Fence

What Everyone Should Know Before Talking to a Fencing Contractor, but Almost No One is Aware Of Until It's Too Late

Spend a few minutes reviewing this report before purchasing a fence, or several years wishing you had!

Purchasing a fence can be confusing. Face it, you don't buy a fence very often, but when you do, you want your fence to last a long time and look great for years to come. Most people are unaware of the many variables that go into the building and installation of a fence. The less you know usually means you will pay more for an inferior product that may not even last five years! Protect yourself up front by understanding what is important, what to demand, and what to avoid at all costs.

The Basics

- 1. What do I need to know to make a smart buying decision?** Although there is a lot to know about what contributes to making a smart decision in purchasing a fence, it really comes down to quality and variety of materials; construction & Installation techniques; competitive pricing; and the experience of the contractor to ensure that you get the fence that is right for you at the right price.
- 2. How do you know if the contractor has the proper experience?** A good contractor will spend enough time with you before you make your decision answering any questions you have, making you aware of the many options that exist, and also helping you determine exactly what you want in a fence, so that you wind up with the product that is best for you. He should also have a good working knowledge of the neighborhood or subdivision where you live, so that he is aware of all local codes, and even be familiar with the soil density and rock content of the area to help anticipate any possible needs his crews will have when installing your fence in your yard.
- 3. How do I know what fence is best for me?** Fences play many roles, and there are different styles that meet different needs. Some styles of fences provide greater levels of security than others. Other styles provide more privacy. Still other styles will look better with some types of houses than others. A good contractor will be able to offer any style of fence you might desire, be able to completely and concisely answer any questions you have about it, and be able to install it with his owned trained & experienced crews.
- 4. How long should it take to install my fence?** It depends on the size of the job, but most fences can be installed in one to three days. There is no reason to have to wait days or weeks between when the fence posts are installed, and when the rails, gates, and the rest of the job is completed. This is the sign of an over-extended contractor. Avoid at all cost contractors that drag out the installation process for more than three days. An installation should always be completed without daygaps.

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Look and Quality of Fence

5. **What do I need to know to look for in a quality fence?** A quality fence is made up of the finest materials, combined with an installation process that leaves you with a fence that is straight, level, sturdy, and one that will stand up to the test of time and give you at least 15 to 20 years of service and peace of mind. The better the materials and installation techniques used, the longer your fence will last.
6. **How can I tell if the fencing contractor is using the proper materials?** It can be hard to tell sometimes, because you ask for specifics, you will most likely be given a bunch of general statements and platitudes that really don't tell you anything. A competent fencing contractor should want to share specifics about the materials he is using, and why they are the best available. For example, if you were considering a wood fence, you would want to know that your fence would be constructed of a premium Grade Western Red Cedar. Premium Grade Western Red Cedar is the best wood material to use because it grows slower making it stronger, has fewer knots, The pickets will actually be knot free (clear pickets) which will give your fence a greater look and it will last longer.
7. **What do I need to know about the installation process?** The installation process can impact your satisfaction with your new fence long after the installation is forgotten. How deep are the fence posts sunk in the ground? If they are not at least three feet below the surface, your fence is much more likely to wobble and go out of line before it should. How do they ensure that every run is level and true? We use a system called the **Bi-Lateral Alignment Process** that runs a double line high and low on opposite sides of the fence posts that makes it impossible to be set improperly, ensuring that the fence run is straight and level every time!
8. **What is the biggest problem I need to watch out for with a wood fence?** The gates on most wood fences sag and stick within 90 days of the installation. That's why most contractors will only warranty their gates for 90 days. **We warranty ours for 7 years!** We can do this because we build ours different. We build them with a mitered picture frame construction with two diagonal supports, hand nailed to prevent splitting and cracking. Did we mention we warranty them for 7 years?
9. **What do I need to know if I'm getting a vinyl fence?** If you decide on a vinyl fence, you want to make sure that they only use virgin vinyl under the outer shell, not recycled, that they use a mono extrusion process, and that they use six-foot sections instead of eight-foot sections, which will sag over time. They should only use top quality vinyl, so that the exterior profile looks like wood, not plastic. When the concrete is poured into the postholes, it should top off six to eight inches below the soil line to avoid freeze damage in the winter. There is a lot more to know about buying a vinyl fence, but these are some basic points that any contractor should cover up front. If he doesn't, or has different answers, find a different contractor.
10. **How about an aluminum fence?** All aluminum is the same, but what happens to it when it is manufactured into a fence product makes all the difference in the world. We use an advanced powder coating system that allows us to produce a high quality, long lasting finish. All components are extruded from 6005-T5 alloys, with a minimum ultimate strength of 35,000 psi. What this means is your fence will stand up to anything mother nature or the neighborhood kids throw at it, supported by our Lifetime Warranty covering defects in workmanship & materials as well as chipping peeling or cracking of the finish, for life!

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Price/Final Cost

- 11. How do I know what a fence should cost?** It will vary by type of fence you will order, but the cost of a fence will usually be dependent on a combination of time and materials, and this can vary significantly from one contractor to another. An experienced contractor should be able to explain exactly what goes into a fence if you have questions why one wood fence costs more than another. The least expensive fence is usually cheap for a reason. Inferior materials and a shoddy installation process may lower the cost of a fence, but will always result in an inferior fence that will need to be replaced in five years or less.
- 12. Should I haggle over price?** Not if you are working with a reputable fence contractor. A reputable fence contractor should always give you his best price first, up front. If he doesn't, he is taking advantage of the possibility that you may not know everything you need to know about what you are buying. Be EXTREMELY wary of any contractor that will offer you a lower price to match or beat a competitive bid. If he is willing to do this, it means he was more than willing to overcharge you up front.
- 13. Will the final cost always match the estimate?** Basically, yes. A competent fence contractor will be able to provide you with a detailed estimate that will cover all anticipated costs, and some variables that may not be so easy to anticipate. For example, some subdivisions are known to have been developed on very rocky soil. If this is the case, a good contractor will put in his estimate contingency information that tells you he may have to use a specialized digging tool like the *Dandy Digger* if rock formations are below the soil. But unless there are changes to the original fence plan, like added gates or extra coverage, the final price should ALWAYS match the estimate. Do not go with a fencing contractor that will not make this guarantee!
- 14. Does company ownership structure of the company affect the cost of a fence.** It can. The ownership structure of any company can affect the cost of the product or service it sells based on the overhead and profit requirements in place. If there are shareholders or multiple partners in place, they likely need to see a greater return on each fencing job than a sole proprietor or family owned company does.

Service

- 15. How do I know the crew will be there when they say they will?** This is where references can be a big help. Your contractor should be able to provide references that can attest to the professionalism of the crew that did the work, and also give you first hand information regarding the details. If the installation requires more than one day, the crew should be there at the same time each day, no exceptions. If they cannot make it due to extreme weather or any other circumstances, you should be contacted at the time they would normally get started to be advised of this.
- 16. How long is a typical workday?** It varies by crew and company. The best crews like what they do, and get a sense of accomplishment by completing the jobs by working a little

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longer if necessary. The best companies encourage them to do just that, rather than leaving the yard until the following day for a couple hours to finish everything up.

Service continued...

17. When the crew leaves, will the job be 100% complete? Any professional fence contractor will have a procedure in place that the crew goes through before leaving the job. This should include the job foreman and at least one crewmember walking the entire job site inspecting the workmanship and the post job clean up, ensuring everything has been completed according to the initial plan and intent. The final action should be a meeting with the homeowner to answer any questions, provide maintenance suggestions, and demonstrate any components like gates or removable panels. The final invoice should only be presented when the homeowner is totally satisfied with the end result.

Additional Points to Consider

18. What if I don't know exactly where to put the fence? If you do not have clearly defined lot lines, a good fencing contractor will arrange to have a survey done for you to determine exactly where your lot ends and your neighbor's begins. If you have questions about where the fence should be placed in the context of your home and yard, an experienced contractor will be able to give you guidance, backed by several examples of similar projects you can drive by to see for yourself how it would look in your yard.

19. I've seen the same types of products at Menards & Home Depot for a lot less. How can they sell it so cheap? The products sold at the big box building supply stores are not nearly the same quality you are getting from a reputable fence contractor. In addition, all installation of those products, if you do not do it yourself, are subbed out to contractors who may or may not even be in the fence business. For anyone who wants a quality job that will last more than five years, this is probably not a good option.

20. Will my yard be all tore up after the installation is complete? When the job is complete, your yard should look the same as it did before the job started, except you now have a nice, new fence around it. The only evidence that there was a construction project at all will be the dirt that was displaced when the postholes were dug. The dirt should be raked up neatly into piles along the perimeter of the property, unless there is a specific location that was designated for it at the start of the job. There should be no ruts in the yard or any other sign that an installation crew was there. When installed properly, the new fence should appear to have "magically" grown out of the landscape.

21. What else do I need to be aware of? Don't forget about your neighbors, even if one of the main reasons to have your fence installed is to keep them out. Installing a new fence is a disruption, and communicating in advance what to expect is a basic courtesy. Look for a contractor that understands this, and is willing to help you prepare them for what to expect. If your neighbors are informed up front of what to expect, when the installation will take place, and when it will be complete, they are much less likely to have a problem with it.

We hope the 21 questions and answers contained in this report have helped you understand what is important to be aware of when you decide to replace your old fence, or

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get a new one for your yard. Whether you hire A to Z Quality Fencing, or some other fencing contractor to assist you with your fencing project, make sure you get these 21 questions answered to your complete satisfaction before moving forward with anyone.