

A great fence looks simple once it is standing straight and square, but the path to a fair price can feel like hacking through brush without a compass. One Fencing Contractor swears they can build that cedar privacy run for half what the last Fence Company quoted. Another fence installer insists on a bigger concrete footer and heavier posts that you cannot see once it is buried. Somewhere in the middle lives the right scope, the right price, and the right crew.

I have walked dozens of backyards with homeowners, measured slopes with a short level when we were supposed to be chatting about stain colors, and seen bids swing more than 40 percent on the same fence. If you want a number worth trusting, you need to know what drives cost, how to frame your project so Fence Contractors give apples-to-apples bids, and where the quote itself hides the tells. Once you see it, you cannot unsee it. You will also stop overpaying.

What actually drives price, beyond “linear feet”

Most quotes start with a friendly number: cost per linear foot. Use it for rough math, but do not build your budget on it. Linear feet only describe the start of the story. Five forces do most of the pushing: materials, layout, ground, gates, and timing.

Materials are the obvious one, but the grade within a material matters more than people realize. Cedar runs from builder grade to clear, straight-grained boards that stay flatter under sun. Pressure-treated pine can be a bargain, but in hot, dry climates it loves to twist unless it is allowed to acclimate. Vinyl and composite jump the price yet offer long warranties and minimal upkeep. Ornamental aluminum looks crisp, resists rust better than steel, and installs faster on slopes with rackable panels. Chain link is still the budget king, and in galvanized with privacy slats it can live a hard-working life around a shop yard without complaint.

Layout pushes cost in sneaky ways. A 180-foot rectangle with two 10-foot gates is cheaper than the same footage broken into zigzags with short panels to dodge trees, utilities, and a patio edge. Every inside corner adds a bracing challenge. Every outside corner wants to rack the panel out of square. The more you bend and jog the line, the more time a fencing installer spends fitting, cutting, and re-leveling. Time is the tax.

Ground conditions decide how fast posts set and how often a crew hits the truck for different tools. Clay grips an auger bit like a vise. Rocky soils bounce the bit and break tips. In frost zones you need deeper holes. In sandy loam you need larger diameters to resist uplift. If your backyard slopes, step-down builds mean more cuts and additional pickets to fill gaps. Retaining tie-ins sometimes mean concrete the quote never mentioned.

Gates are where projects go long. A single 3-foot walk gate is simple. Add a 12-foot double-swing steel frame for a trailer, and you just added a day of work for two people, plus heavier hardware and braces. Automatic operators, keypads, and drop rods multiply the price further. Get gate details in writing, down to hinge type and latch material.

Timing has a cost too. Fencing Contractors fill their calendars in spring and early summer. If you bid in April with every neighbor chasing upgrades, you will feel the squeeze. Off-peak requests in late summer or early fall often land better pricing, especially if you accept a flexible start date that helps a Fence Company fill gaps between big commercial jobs or work around rain days.

The anatomy of a post hole, and why it matters

Most of the value in a fence lives underground. If a quote feels suspiciously low, look for quiet cuts buried in the dirt.

Depth first. In mild climates with no real frost heave, a 24-inch hole for a 6-foot wood privacy fence might work. In frost zones or wind-prone areas, 30 to 36 inches is smarter. I have seen 20-inch holes hold for a few seasons, then lean noticeably toward the neighbor who likes to lean back against the boards. You will not spot this on day one, but you will live with it in year three.

Diameter second. A 4x4 post in wood often sits in a 9 to 12 inch hole. Steel posts that carry heavy cedar can want a 12 to 14 inch hole. Bigger dia equals more concrete, which drags costs up. You pay for the concrete twice: once in material, once in mixing and carry time. The wrong size is the cheapest way to throw money away, because it lets the wind work on your fence all winter.

Spacing third. Standard spacing runs 8 feet on center. Stretch to 10 feet and you save a few posts and holes, but every panel flexes more and gates struggle with sag unless they carry steel frames. On sloped grades, shorter spans keep lines tight and gaps small near the ground. A professional fencing installer will adjust spacing near ends and gates to avoid awkward slivers. It looks trivial on paper; it saves trouble on site.

Let's put numbers to it. Say you have 180 linear feet of 6 foot cedar with steel posts at 8 foot spacing. That is roughly 23 posts. At 10 inches diameter by 30 inches deep, each hole holds about 0.17 cubic yards of concrete. Multiply by 23, you are near 3.9 yards. Bagged mix comes in 0.6 cubic foot sacks, about 45 bags per yard. Call it 175 bags. That is roughly two pallets of mix through a mixer, plus muscle. Switch to 12 inch diameter, and your concrete jumps to around 6.7 yards, which changes how a crew stages and whether a mini mixer delivery makes more sense than hand mixing. These choices show up in the quote if the Fencing Contractor itemizes. If they do not, ask.

How to set the scope so bids line up

Fence Contractors cannot price what they do not know. If you want comparable quotes, you need to hand them the same scope, even if it is on a single clean page. You do not need a blueprint. You do need enough detail to keep creativity from bloating the number.

Here is the short list I hand to homeowners before they call the first Fence Company:

- Total footage by side, with a simple sketch that shows corners, slopes, and any objects to work around
- Target material and style, including post type, picket thickness, and fasteners
- Gate count and width, plus swing direction and latch height
- Removal and haul away requirements, including who handles roots and shrubs
- Permit, survey, and utility locate plan, with who pays and who schedules

That little page shaves fluff off quotes because it removes guesswork. If a contractor thinks you might choose composite, they may bid heavy just in case. If you say cedar board-on-board with steel posts and stainless screws, they will price that exactly. If you tell them you have an HOA with a 6 foot limit and a dog that digs, they will include rot board and wire mesh drop where needed. Clarity narrows bids faster than haggling.

The site walk that saves you thousands

You can learn more in fifteen minutes on site than in any stack of PDFs. Watch how the fencing installer works the line. Do they run a string and check heights against the slope, or do they eyeball and promise they will make it look right later. Do they measure both sides of the yard and talk about sight lines from the kitchen window, or do

they talk only about price per foot. Do they kneel to test soil with a bar, or poke once and change the subject. Professionals diagnose ground like mechanics diagnose an engine.

Ask simple, concrete questions. How deep do you set posts on this soil for a 6 foot fence. How do you handle a low spot where water collects near the patio. What is your plan for stepping the fence on the slope along the alley. If they answer with real numbers and options, you have a pro. If they say do not worry about it three times in a row, keep looking.

Neighbors matter here too. If you share a boundary, get written permission and alignment on cost share. In many neighborhoods, splitting costs on a shared fence is customary but not mandatory. A friendly conversation with a sketch and an estimated range prevents standoffs. From experience, a 50 percent neighbor contribution on a shared 80 foot run can shift your decision from pine to cedar without blowing the budget.

Permits, surveys, and the little flags in your grass

Nothing burns a timeline like a missing locate. Before anyone digs, call 811 for utilities. It is a free service in most regions, but scheduling windows vary. Expect 2 to 5 business days for marks in many states, sometimes longer after storms. Do not pay a crew to sip coffee while waiting on orange and blue paint.

Surveys can be just as critical. I have seen fences two feet inside a property line for twenty years without trouble, then a new neighbor decides that land is theirs. If your pins are buried or you [Colorbodr panel suppliers](#) never had a formal survey, budget a few hundred dollars. Many Fencing Contractors will help you find pins and line up on known points, but they are not surveyors, and if a dispute appears, everyone wishes the survey happened earlier.

Permits vary wildly by city. Some towns want a simple online notice. Others require drawings, setbacks from sidewalks, and specific materials on corner lots to maintain sight triangles for traffic. Fees can run from nothing to a few hundred dollars. Ask your Fence Company if they handle permits and what they charge for administration. If they tell you permits are never needed in your area, check your city website. The homeowner carries the risk if the inspector shows up.

Reading a quote like a blueprint

A good quote works like a map. It tells you where the money travels. Look for line items. Materials should break out posts, rails, pickets or panels, concrete, fasteners, hardware, stain if included. Labor should reflect removal, hole digging, setting, framing, picket install, gates, and cleanup. There may be a mobilization fee that covers equipment and delivery, especially for jobs that need a skid steer or concrete delivery.

Markups are not a dirty word. A Fence Company deserves margin on materials they purchase and handle. What you want is transparency. If every material line has a round number that looks like a guess, ask for quantities. If labor is a single blob, ask how many crew days the number assumes. If they dodge, that is a data point.

Exclusions reveal more than inclusions. Many quotes exclude rock excavation, roots thicker than your wrist, and irrigation repairs. That is fine, but the change order process should be plain. Good contracts say something like rock billed at an hourly rate per crew with a not to exceed cap unless approved. Watch out for vague language that lets a contractor treat every small obstacle as a new billable event. Things come up. You want predictable rules for handling them.

Allowances can be your friend if used carefully. Suppose you want an automatic driveway gate but have not chosen the operator. An allowance line at a realistic range keeps the project moving while preserving budget

space. Just do not let a contractor anchor an allowance at a low number to make a bid look sweet. A quick check with a supplier will tell you whether the allowance matches market cost.

Warranties belong in writing. Wood warranties are tricky, since wood is a living material even after it is cut. A solid Fencing Contractor will warranty workmanship, like post set and gate function, usually 1 to 3 years. Material warranties may come from the manufacturer on vinyl, aluminum, and composite panels, often 10 to lifetime. Confirm who handles warranty claims. If a panel warps in year three, do you call the Fence Company or the manufacturer.

The red flags that predict headaches

Here are the six alarm bells I have learned to respect:

- A bid that is 25 percent lower than the pack without a clear reason tied to scope or material changes
- Post depth specified vaguely as deep enough or as local standard with no inches listed
- Hardware listed as black or heavy duty with no brand, finish, or latch type
- Concrete described as dry pack or simply bags poured in the hole without mixing on a job that needs true footings
- Payment terms demanding more than 50 percent up front, or final payment due before gates are hung and swing is tested
- A contractor who cannot name three recent jobs within 15 minutes of your address

Low prices often come from thinner posts, shallower holes, or fasteners that rust. Dry pack is a debate. In small jobs with dry climate and good soil, some Fence Contractors pour dry mix and count on ground moisture. In variable climates, mixed concrete creates a consistent footing. I have replaced too many heaved posts set in dry mix to endorse it where freeze or constant moisture is a factor.

Real numbers from real backyards

On a recent 150 foot cedar board-on-board job with steel posts in a mild climate, we saw the following spread. The highest quote came in near 72 dollars per foot, the mid group clustered around 58 to 62, and one outlier at 46. The outlier specified 20 inch holes, 8 foot spans, and bagged nails. The cluster specified 30 inch holes, 8 foot spans, Simpson brackets, and stainless screws for gates. The top quote used thicker pickets and a 12 inch diameter hole with 36 inch depth, plus oil-based stain applied after a 30 day dry. We chose a contractor at 60 per foot, switched gate frames to steel, and negotiated a winter start date with a discount that brought it to about 57. The fence still stands dead plumb two years later.

For a basic galvanized chain link around a one quarter acre lot, 300 feet with two 4 foot gates, pricing in my area sat between 18 and 26 per foot, mostly driven by terminal post count and concrete. Privacy slats added roughly 4 to 7 per foot and a week of lead time. On ornamental aluminum, 4 foot high with 3 rails, think 40 to 55 per foot, more with decorative finials or complicated slope adjustments.

Gates swing the math. A 12 foot double aluminum gate can be a 900 to 1,800 dollar add, depending on frame, hinges, and ground drop under the swing. A 16 foot steel farm gate with posts, bracing, and drop rod can push 1,500 to 2,500. Motorization raises the floor to a few thousand more once you add power, trenching, photocells, and controls.

Seasonality, weather, and leverage

Every Fencing company schedules against the sky. After a week of rain, holes collapse, concrete sets slow, and a crew burns hours bailing mud from holes. If you can be flexible with your start date, you become easy to schedule between commercial work and weather windows. Easy jobs get better numbers. Tell the estimator you can float two to four weeks as long as they give a 48 hour heads-up. You just made their life easier. Many will quietly trim labor contingency in return.

Winter can favor the brave. In many regions, late fall to early winter sees softer demand. Ground can be harder, but crews are hungry. Cedar and steel prices may stabilize after summer spikes. I have seen 5 to 10 percent drops offered in November for jobs willing to start after the first frost. Your job might take a day longer, but the math still wins.

Value engineering without regret

Cutting cost does not have to mean cutting corners. The trick is to trim where you will not notice in five years.

One lever is post material and spacing balance. On a 6 foot privacy run, dropping from 3 inch square steel posts to 2 1/2 inch with the same concrete and staying at 8 foot spacing may be fine in a sheltered yard. Or, keep the heavier posts and increase spacing slightly, but pair it with thicker rails to control deflection. Your Fencing Contractor should model this in simple terms.

Another lever is board grade. Move from clear cedar to a select tight knot grade, and put savings into stainless screws on gates, a better latch, or a deeper footing. Your eye will not register small knot differences from 20 feet, but it will notice a sagging gate every day.

Gates offer add-ons that are worth it. A steel frame inside a wood gate doubles the life. Ball-bearing hinges are not marketing fluff, they swing true for years. Spend here, skip the decorative post caps if needed.

Stain options can wait. Many homeowners want the finished, stained look on day one. Some woods benefit from a few weeks of dry time before stain, and many Fence Contractors charge a premium to stain during build. Consider staining 30 to 60 days after install, either DIY or with a dedicated staining service that may price more competitively per square foot.

How to negotiate like a grown-up

There is a difference between bullying a price and building a fair deal. A professional Fence Company expects you to ask questions and seek value. They do not expect to defend their livelihood against a spreadsheet of internet myths.

Come with two realistic bids already in hand, and tell the third contractor where those numbers landed and why you are still looking. If you prefer their plan, ask whether matching is possible if you accept a later start, fewer change order risks, or a simpler gate choice. Offer something, do not just demand a discount. If you can pay by check and avoid card fees, say so. If you can group your job with a neighbor on the same block, tell them. Electricians and roofers do this all the time; Fence Contractors appreciate it too.

Payment schedules are negotiable within reason. Industry norms vary, but a typical rhythm is 10 to 30 percent to secure materials and a slot, another 40 to 50 percent after posts are set, and the remainder at completion when gates swing, lines are cleaned, and haul off is done. If someone wants 70 percent up front, ask why. If you are financing or working through insurance after storm damage, be open about timelines.

Picking between good and good enough

At some point, you will have two decent options from reputable Fence Contractors. One is a little cheaper, can start next week, and uses crews you have not met because they run multiple teams. The other is a hands-on owner-operator Fencing Contractor who will be on site and starts in three weeks. There is no universal right choice.

If your yard has quirks, if you have a tight HOA, or if gate alignment with a driveway slope will make or break the job, the person who stands there holding the level wins. If the project is straight, materials are standard, and the cheaper contractor shows a thick folder of recent local jobs, take the savings and spend it on stain or a better latch.

Try this test. Ask for one address within two miles, built in the last six months, with the same material and style. Then drive by. Look along the top line. Good crews run a line that does not pogo up and down with every picket. Look at gates from the side. Hinges plumb, latch closing crisp, no big taper wedged into the bottom. Tap a post with your foot. A solid set sounds and feels solid.

The quiet costs that sneak into change orders

Removal and haul off often reads as a single line item. How much fence is coming out, and what is it made of. Old concrete footings take time to bust or dig out. Expect at least a half-day on a 150 foot lot if the old posts were set deep. Haul fees reflect landfill and transfer station rates, which vary by region. A typical run of 150 feet of old wood with concrete and some metal can weigh close to a ton and a half. You cannot stuff that in your trash bin.



Irrigation lines hate augers. If you have sprinkler heads along the line, flag them. A careful crew will still hit a line occasionally. Decide in advance who fixes minor breaks. Many Fence Companies will handle quick PVC repairs at a simple hourly rate. What you want to avoid is a fight when a lateral line pops and soaks a hole.

Pets and access add friction. If a crew has to secure your dog between phases or carry materials through a house because side gates are too narrow, say it up front. They will price the hassle once instead of padding to cover surprises. Tell them who holds the key if you work during the day. The fastest way to blow a schedule is a locked yard at 8 a.m.

Matching material to climate and lifestyle

Not everyone needs the same fence. Think beyond look and price.

Wood wins where privacy and warmth matter. In dry climates, cedar holds up and ages to a silver hue if left untreated. In swampy zones, heavy treatment and airflow under pickets help. Board-on-board gives true privacy, but it costs more in boards and time. Horizontal slats look modern and catch wind like a sail if not braced and spaced correctly.

Vinyl suits low-maintenance seekers. It cleans with a hose, does not need stain, and stays bright. Heat can make it a bit flexible, so in desert climates choose profiles that resist sag and confirm UV stabilization in the resin. Ground heave demands deeper posts.

Ornamental aluminum delivers curb appeal with low rust risk, perfect around pools where codes demand certain heights and picket spacing. Make sure coating quality matches your region. Cheaper powder coats chalk and fade faster in direct sun.

Chain link defends a budget and secures yards for dogs and equipment. Black vinyl-coated chain link blends better than bare galvanizing. Privacy slats help, but wind loads increase and terminals need to be braced.

Composite is the luxury track. It carries weight and cost. If you plan to stay put for a decade and want a uniform look with minimal upkeep, it can be worth the premium. Be honest about budget and replacement parts availability years from now.

What a professional relationship looks like after the dig

Great contractors do not vanish when the truck leaves. They check within a week to confirm concrete cured clean, gates did not sag as the wood adjusted, and dogs are not tunneling under the new line. They will ask you to hose off concrete dust that can spot boards. They will remind you to wait before staining.

Keep simple maintenance in mind. Wood benefits from a recoat of stain every 2 to 4 years, depending on exposure. Hinges like a shot of lubricant every spring. Soil tends to pile against bottom rails; rake it back to allow airflow. Little care stretches lifespan far more than one thicker board ever will.

And if something feels off, call. A latch that scrapes on day five is a five-minute fix. A latch that scrapes for six months wears a groove that takes an hour to repair.

Bringing it all together

The best quote is not the lowest number and not the thickest proposal. It is a clear scope matched to your yard, from a Fence Company that has built fences like yours in your neighborhood, with specifications you understand well enough to defend. It accounts for ground, gates, and timing. It prices the work you can see and the work you cannot. It includes a plan for the hiccups that come with digging in real dirt.

Pick your partners with a level head. Good Fencing Contractors earn loyalty because they show their work. They do not hide their math, and they do not need to. If you meet one, you will know. They talk about holes as much as pickets. They take notes while you talk about dogs and sprinklers. They carry a string line and treat your yard like a jobsite, not a sales call.

Do the small things that make a big difference. Define your scope on one page. Walk the site with questions that force specifics. Read the quote for what it excludes more than what it promises. Be flexible on schedule if your life allows it. Put money where it does the most work, usually in posts, footings, and gate hardware. If you follow that trail, your fence will stand straight and strong long after the memory of bidding fades. And that is the real prize: a quiet boundary that does its job, while you get back to living inside it.