

There is something satisfying about the first morning of a new fence. The kettle is still warm, the yard is a blank canvas, and a ute pulls up stacked with posts and rails that smell like a hardware store at sunrise. If you have booked a timber fence installer, that day one sets the tone for the whole job. It is less glamorous than the final reveal, more noise and string lines than sweeping finishes, but it is where good fences are made or lost. The crew's habits, the order of work, the small adjustments to your site and soil, all of it matters. If you know the rhythm, you can help the day run smoothly and spot the difference between an efficient timber fencing contractor and someone winging it.

The first five minutes set the pace

Expect the crew to arrive within a window, not to the minute. Traffic, yard pickups, and last minute hardware runs are real life. A seasoned timber fence builder will take two or three minutes right at the start to introduce the team lead, confirm your name, scope, and access. If they tumble out of the ute and start digging before saying hello, you will probably spend the next two days chasing answers.

Good installers do a fast safety walkthrough before the first tool leaves the truck. Think utility locations, pet containment, and vehicle paths on the lawn. If you hear the words, let's mark the line and check the fall, you are in good hands. Those two tasks drive the placement of every post, rail, and paling that follows.

A quick pre-day-one checklist you can do the night before

- Unlock side gates, clear 1 meter of access along the fence line, and flag sprinkler heads with bright tape.
- Keep pets indoors or in a secure run and warn the crew if you have an anxious dog or escape-artist cat.
- Park cars off the driveway to leave space for materials and a barrow path.
- Confirm property boundaries, easements, and the agreed fence height on your quote or plan.
- If a neighbor is shared on the line, make sure they know the start date and expected noise times.

That list looks ordinary, but it prevents the biggest time thieves. I have watched a timber fencing installer lose an hour tracing an invisible irrigation line with a garden fork, another hour easing a nervous kelpie away from the auger, and a third hour moving pot plants you swore you would relocate. Day one gains speed in small margins.

Surveying without drama

Before the first hole, a careful timber fence contractor will walk the line with a measuring tape and your plan. They will check the boundary pegs or any previous survey markers. Where pegs are missing, they usually align to existing features and the neighbor's fence line, but they should ask your permission before making a judgment call. If your block falls 200 millimeters over 20 meters, they will talk you through stepping rails versus raking rails. A subtle slope can be absorbed by raking, while a pronounced one looks better stepped. Both choices have trade-offs. Raked rails hug the ground line, which helps with pet containment but can accentuate undulations. Stepped rails give clean horizontal lines, though you get little triangular gaps at each step that need in-fills if you want it critter-tight.

In denser suburbs, a timber paling fence installer will frequently find an odd post jutting into your yard or a garden bed that has crept over the title boundary like ivy. A professional does not play sheriff. They call it out, propose a tidy solution, and, if needed, pause the dig until both owners agree. The fastest fence sometimes makes the slowest neighbors.

Utilities, then holes

At some point you will hear the phrase, do you know where the services run. Power and gas are usually in the front setback, water can be anywhere, and irrigation lines are magic until they are nicked. Good practice is to call the national utility locator a week or two before the job and to pothole by hand for suspect areas. A competent timber fencing contractor packs a long 12 millimeter rod to probe for PVC or shallow cable, and they keep a spade handy to open suspicious sections before the auger bites. Ten minutes of probing saves a soggy trench and a cranky plumber later.

Once clear, the crew will plan their holes. Spacing depends on fence type, wind exposure, and the timber section you have chosen. On a typical 1.8 meter timber paling fence, expect posts at 2.4 meters centers with three rails. Coastal or high wind areas often tighten that to 2.1 or 2.2 meters. Taller screens change the arithmetic. I have built 2.4 meter acoustic runs with 100 x 100 posts on 1.8 meters centers because the sail effect is real. A seasoned timber fencing builder will not be shy about shorter spans in a gusty corridor. It looks like overkill until the first westerly rattles the neighborhood.

Hole diameter matters as much as depth. For a 90 x 90 post, a 250 to 300 millimeter diameter hole gives enough concrete collar to resist side load. Depth aims for one third of the post height out of ground, so a 1.8 meter fence wants at least 600 millimeters in firm soils. Clay that turns to pudding after rain will force deeper holes or a bell at the base. Sand wants more depth, a wider foot, or even a drypack method with stabilizing fines. The right timber fence installers adjust by soil, not just by tape measure.

The string line is the real boss

After the rough hole plan, the team snaps a string line between corner posts or temporary stakes. This is the unblinking referee for straightness and face alignment. A tidy timber fencing installer will touch the string, hold their head sideways, and sight the future fence the way a pool builder sights water level. They will tweak a stake three millimeters because they have seen what happens when that tiny wiggle compounds across ten panels.

Corners and gate openings get extra love. If you are installing a single walkway gate, it usually sits between two full posts with a gate pack, not a hacked-in partial solution. Double driveway gates need stronger posts, often 125 x 125 or dressed steel hidden behind timber cladding. A competent timber fencing contractor sets those gate posts day one so the concrete cures fully before hanging the leaves. Wobbly gate posts are forever annoying. This is why a methodical crew never rushes that pour.



The gear that should show up

One or two petrol augers or a hydraulic drive on a skid or mini loader, two wheelbarrows, post hole shovels, tamping bars, string lines, a builder's level or a laser, chop saw for rails, circular saw for palings if any cutting is needed, and the usual hand tools. On bigger sites, a mini loader saves hours. If your yard access is narrow, be honest about it when you book. I have backed a loader through a 900 millimeter gate with 20 millimeters of play on each side, but that is not a fun morning for anyone.

Materials should look the part. Posts straight and free of end splits. Rails of consistent section, not a lucky dip. Palings stacked flat to avoid warping. Treated timber should be clean green or honey in tone, not [Outstanding fencing timber fence](#) leaching white crystals, which can signal poor curing. If you have paid for hardwood posts

or cypress, confirm the species stamping. A reliable timber fencing installer labels bundles and keeps the paperwork handy.

Concrete, not porridge

There are two philosophies on setting posts. Some crews wet mix in a barrow for a uniform pour. Others dry mix in the hole and then add water. Both methods can work if the water content, consolidation, and curing are controlled. What you do not want is a gritty slush that slumps, or a desert-dry crumble that never binds. Post setting is part recipe, part feel. In most suburban jobs you will see 20 to 30 kilograms of premix per hole for a 90 x 90 post at standard depth. Wider or deeper holes push that higher. Expect a timber fencing builder to set a run of posts, true them both plumb and to line, then brace them while the concrete grabs.

Time matters here. Rapid set concretes can take a good initial hold in 15 to 30 minutes, which is perfect if a gust picks up. Full cure still takes days. If the plan is to fix rails late day one, rapid set keeps the schedule realistic. In colder months, standard mix gives more working time. A fussy installer will tamp and rod the concrete to release air pockets and prevent honeycombing, then crown the top so water sheds away from the post, not into it.

Noise, mess, and the rhythm of work

An auger has one volume setting: loud. Expect the noisiest window to be mid morning when holes are opened, then a quieter pattern as posts are trued and concrete mixed. A tidy timber fencing contractor lays out a tarp or uses the nature strip for spoil and cement bags, sweeps paths at lunch and at the end of the day, and doesn't leave a confetti trail of plastic straps. If the crew leaves a slurry of wet cement footprints on your pavers, speak up. Clean sites are not about fastidiousness, they are about safety and pride.

Spoil management can surprise people. A 300 millimeter hole, 700 millimeters deep, multiplied by ten posts, creates a small moon of earth, and it fluffs up once it leaves the ground. Most quotes exclude removal unless noted, so ask your timber fencing contractor before they start. I have traded an hour of barrow work for a neighbor who wanted free fill to level his kid's cubby. Everyone won that day.

Rails and height checks

If the concrete has grabbed, many crews will start cutting and fixing rails late in the day. For a 1.8 meter timber paling fence, you typically see three rails: top, middle, bottom. Heights vary by region and code, but a common layout is bottom rail at 200 to 250 millimeters off grade to keep clear of splash zone, middle rail at around 900 millimeters, and top rail just under the final fence height, keeping a neat clamping zone for palings. Rails are fixed to the face that will receive palings, so if you are paying for a dressed side, clarify which yard gets the neat face. This is a famous neighbor misunderstanding. A clear timber fencing installation quote will state which way the rails face and which side looks smooth.

Rail cuts should be snug to posts without gaps wider than a cigarette. That detail affects stiffness. A practiced timber fence installer staggers rail joins so no single bay becomes weak. On sloped blocks they may step rails, keeping each run level, or rake them to follow the fall. Either choice needs the string and level checks again, because your eye will notice a slightly drifting top rail long before you notice a wonky paling.

Special notes on timber paling fences

The humble timber paling fence is the suburban workhorse. It looks simple, yet the best timber paling fencing installers see a dozen micro-decisions other people miss. Palings can be butt joined or overlapped for privacy.

Overlap tolerates shrinkage and seasonal movement better but adds material and labor. Nail choice matters. Hot-dip galvanized ring shanks hold, electro-galv smooth shanks do not in wet climates. I have returned to fences three summers later where smooth nails backed themselves out like little silver mushrooms. A proper timber paling fence contractor sizes nails to avoid splitting the palings near the edges and staggers them to prevent rails from becoming a nail ladder that invites splitting.

If you are adding capping, day one is where the post heights are checked for a continuous plane. A sloppy cut now becomes a wavy cap later. Cap boards add protection to paling tops and dress the line, but they collect water if not beveled. Good builders give them a slight fall to shed rain.

Gates deserve VIP treatment

If the job includes a gate, watch where the team stores the hardware box. A careful timber fencing builder keeps it clean and dry, checks that hinges are the right type for the post material, and dry fits the latch to visualize swing clearance. Steel framed timber gates behave nicely over time. Full timber gates are lighter on the wallet but heavier on maintenance, especially in wet-dry cycles where they cup or bow. Your installer will often suggest a diagonal brace that runs from the bottom latch-side corner up to the top hinge-side to resist sag. That brace placement is not negotiable if you want the gate to open with one finger a year from now.

Weather, soil, and other non-negotiable realities

Weather plays umpire. Light showers are a nuisance. Heavy rain turns your post holes into soup bowls and makes concrete guesswork. A reliable timber fencing contractor will call a weather delay early, not after tearing the yard open. Wind is the other bully. Strings whip, posts kite, and rails act like wings. When gusts push over 30 or 40 kilometers per hour, progress slows by half, and you will see more bracing on every post.

Soils have personalities. Reactive clay swells and shrinks like a breathing animal. Your timber fence installer may bell the base of holes or switch to a mix that resists washout. Sandy loam falls in on itself, so holes are opened and set in smaller batches to avoid collapse. If you hear the team sigh about river rock or shale, expect hand digging, crowbars, and a schedule shuffle. I have had days where progress fell to two posts an hour in ironstone. No machine cared. It took muscles and patience.

Neighbors, lines, and the art of diplomacy

Most fences are co-owned in spirit if not in law. Even when your neighbor is not paying, they may have garden features tight to the line. Vines, trellises, the world's most cherished rosemary bush. A courteous timber fencing contractor will lift what can be saved, trim back what is agreed, and never scalp a hedge without a conversation. If the line is tight, the crew might temporarily offset the string, set the posts, and then cut back vegetation before rails go on. This keeps tension low and progress high.

On shared projects I like to put a simple hand sketch on a clipboard and have both neighbors sign off on height, paling orientation, and gate locations before the first bag of cement is opened. It takes five minutes and defuses that classic line on day two: I thought the good side was mine. If you have hired separate timber fence contractors for the same boundary on each yard, coordinate. Mixed crews on a single run are a recipe for crossed strings and polite but icy tea breaks.

Safety is not a slogan

I have seen drill strings catch a shirt and drag a worker like a rag doll. Augers bite. Cement dust irritates lungs. Splinters find their way under gloves. A professional timber fencing installer plays boring safety games because they have seen the alternative. They set exclusion zones for kids, ask you to keep pets away, and lay out tools so nobody trips over a Makita orphan on the grass. If you see hearing protection, dust masks when cutting, and tidy extension leads, you are watching pros at work.

Communication beats guesswork

The team lead should check in with you midday for small calls. Do you want the fence to step here or there. Is the mailbox staying or going. Where exactly should that gate latch sit so the kids can't reach it, but you can open it with a full laundry basket. Those micro decisions take 30 seconds each. Fixing them later takes an hour and a mood. If your timber fencing builder goes quiet for six hours, step outside with a friendly question and a glass of water. Most crews are grateful and will talk you through the next steps. You will learn, and your fence will be better for it.

A simple sequence for the day

- Arrival, site chat, boundary check, and utility confirmation.
- String line up, hole layout, and first run of digging and hand potholing where needed.
- Posts set in batches, braced to string, and concrete crowned for runoff.
- Gate posts set and triple-checked for plumb, clearances, and swing.
- Rails cut and fixed on the first bays if the concrete has taken, with a tidy site sweep before departure.

The day might flex. Wind rattles the schedule. A surprise soaker hose appears at hole three. A proud toddler needs a photo with the auger. A steady timber fencing installer absorbs the chaos and keeps the structure of the day intact.

Costs that hide in plain sight

Day one does not change your quote, but it can reveal add-ons. Spoil removal if you do not want a soil berm. Rock drilling if your yard is full of old rubble. Additional depth if your council or the site engineer demands it near a retaining wall. None of these should blindside you if the installer scoped properly, but they are common enough to deserve a heads-up. If your timber paling fence installation runs long because of weather, labor costs are usually baked into the fixed price, not metered hourly. Ask politely if you are unsure. Transparent timber fencing contractors answer money questions without getting huffy.

How to tell you hired the right crew

You can see quality before a single paling goes on. Strings are taut, not sagging. Posts are in line even before the braces. Concrete bags are empty and stacked, not tossed into your neighbor's flowerbed. The team moves with a rhythm, two digging, one cutting <https://share.google/1ruBBrVyY47xZzLJ1> rails, one mixing. They laugh, then fall quiet when aligning a gate post like surgeons around a heart. That mix of ease and intensity marks professionals. Amateur timber fencing builders argue loudly about which end of the level to use. You deserve the first group.

Language matters too. Phrases like we will adjust for the fall, or we will creep the line to miss that pipe, or let's set the gate post heavy and true so it never sags, all signal experience. If your installer calls every problem a drama and every fix a compromise, brace yourself.

After the crew leaves on day one

Expect a tidy but incomplete run. Posts braced like a row of metronomes paused mid swing. Maybe the first few bays of rails fixed, maybe not. The site should be walkable without gymnastics. Any open holes should be covered or cordoned off. If the forecast threatens rain overnight, you might see plastic over a few green concrete collars. That is diligence, not fussiness.

Do not lean or push on the posts. Rapid set might hold, but full strength still needs time. Keep kids, dogs, and well-meaning neighbors from testing the wobble. If a brace falls or a post slips half a bubble on the level, snap a photo and send it to the team lead. Most timber fence installers will be on site early on day two and can reset before rails lock things in.

A word on timelines and stamina

A typical suburban boundary run of 25 to 35 meters usually breaks into a two or three day program for a three person crew. Day one handles holes and posts, sometimes rails. Day two finishes rails and starts palings. Day three, if needed, wraps palings, caps, gates, and cleans up. Shorter runs can compress. Longer or gnarlier runs stretch. I have seen a 15 meter line take three full days because it sat on a storm drain easement, demanded deeper posts, and ran into a basalt shelf. The estimate was honest. The ground had other ideas.

Patience helps. Fences look wrong until they look right. Mid build you will see gaps, braces, and raw timber stuck into your tidy garden like a porcupine. Then the rails lock, the palings march along the line, and the chaos resolves into order. If you trust your timber fencing installation team, the transformation is fun to watch.

Final checks you can do with your eyes, not a tool belt

Stand at one corner and sight along the posts. They should march in a ruler-straight line. Check the bracing. It should hold posts without chewing up the timber face. Look at the concrete collars. They should be slightly domed, not cupped. Peek at the gate posts. Are they braced independently and double checked for height and spacing. Glance at the spoil pile. Is it tidy or marching into your rose bed. Each small yes points to a crew that treats your yard with respect.

If something feels off, ask that evening by text or email. The best timber fencing contractors respond quickly and invite you to look again the next morning before work starts. That is the partnership you want. You are not a bystander. You are the client, the one who will live with this fence through storms, summers, and one surprise backyard cricket century.

A note on choosing the people behind the tools

If you are still shopping rather than already booked, ask for a couple of addresses where the crew installed a timber paling fence a year or two ago. Drive by and look at straightness and hardware corrosion. New fences are all beautiful. Old fences tell the truth. Ask whether the timber fence builder you are considering actually puts their own boots on your site or subs the job to a mystery crew. Subcontracting is normal in trades, but transparency is non-negotiable.

There is no magic badge that separates a timber fence installer from a timber fencing contractor or a timber fence builder in name alone. In practice, look for communication, clean quotes, and respect for the physical reality of your yard. The best timber fencing installers solve problems before they become yours. They do not

vanish at 3 pm or leave your side gate unlocked. They ask what time your toddler naps and avoid the loudest work then. These human details signal the craft behind the carpentry.

When day one feels like progress, it is

By sunset on day one, you should see the fence in your head. The line is there, the backbone is in the ground, and the angles that make gates behave are locked. You might even smell the cedar or pine and imagine the first vine that will climb it. That is a good day. The rest is rhythm and finish. With a skilled timber paling fencing contractor guiding the job, the next steps glide. By the weekend you will be training the dog to stay on your side of the palings, and your neighbor will be leaning over complimenting the top cap.

If the first day goes sideways, do not panic. Speak up. Good trades respond well to calm, specific questions. Could we review the line here. Could we flip the dressed side. Could we raise the bottom rail 20 millimeters to clear the pavers. This kind of conversation turns a decent fence into a great one. And a great fence, built by capable timber fencing builders and cared for over time, outlasts plants, fashions, and, sometimes, even owners.

After all, a fence is not just boards and posts. It is a quiet promise between properties. Day one writes the first line of that promise. Make sure the hands holding the string and the auger know what they are doing.