

Understanding Fence and Gate Pricing

This is a buyer's guide, not a sales pitch. It explains what actually moves the price on fencing and gate work, so that if you are holding two or three quotes you can read them properly and see where they differ.

There are no prices in it. It is written to be useful even if you decide to go with somebody else.

What happens below ground

This is the single biggest difference between two quotes that look the same on paper, and it is the part you will never see once the job is done.

Ask what the posts are and how they are fixed. A timber post driven into soil, a timber post concreted in, a concrete post concreted in, and a bolt-down post on an existing hard surface are four different jobs with four different lifespans. Ask how deep the holes go, and whether the spoil from them is going or staying.

A quote that is noticeably cheaper is very often cheaper here.

Timber and treatment

Not all treated timber is the same. There is a difference between timber treated for use above ground and timber treated for ground contact, and a difference again between sawn timber and planed or machined timber.

Ask when the treatment is applied. Timber treated after it is built has bare wood hidden inside every joint and overlap. Timber treated before it is built does not.

Machined timber also needs time between machining and re-treating, usually two to three weeks. A quote offering machined timber next week is worth a question.

Ready-made panels or built on site

Ready-made panels are quicker and cheaper, and for a straight run of even widths on level ground they are a perfectly good answer.

They stop being the right answer when the run does not divide evenly, when the ground falls away, or when you want a particular height. At that point a panel gets cut down, which cuts its frame, and the last section is weaker than the rest for the life of the fence.

Built on site costs more and takes longer. It is worth it where the run is uneven, where the fence is doing a job (privacy, a dog, a boundary that matters), and on any gate.

Gravel boards

A gravel board is the board at the bottom that takes the wet and the soil instead of your panels. Concrete ones last indefinitely. Timber ones will need replacing eventually, which is a far smaller job than replacing panels.

Check whether they are in the quote at all. It is a common place for a price to be trimmed, and it is the part that decides how long everything above it lasts.

The ground, the access and the old fence

Three things change the labour on almost every fencing job:

- What is in the ground. Clay, rubble, old concrete footings, tree roots and buried services all slow the digging, and some of them cannot be known until the first hole is opened
- How the materials get in. A wheelbarrow route through a house, or a narrow side gate, adds real time to every load of posts, concrete and timber
- What is already there. Taking out an old fence, and getting rid of it, is its own piece of work

Ask whether removal and disposal are included, or priced separately, or not covered at all. All three are normal. Not knowing which one you have is not.

What a quote may not cover

Worth checking on any quote you are given, ours included:

- Removal and disposal of the old fence and the spoil from the post holes
- Levelling, stepping or raking the fence where the ground falls
- Concrete or timber gravel boards, and post caps
- Gate furniture: hinges, latch, drop bolt, and whether they are the standard ones or something heavier
- Anything found once digging starts, and how a change like that would be handled
- What happens if the neighbour's side needs access

Two questions worth asking anyone

Ask what goes in the ground, and ask when the timber is treated. The answers to those two will tell you more about a fencing quote than the total at the bottom of it.

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