

Fences

Why fences are important? First of all, they provide privacy and prevent pets from escaping. However, more importantly, fences are an integral part of a home's curb appeal; therefore, we strongly encourage investors to maintain their fences in good shape and to upgrade it at the end-of-life of the original builder-grade fence.

Fences come in many types, but we are limiting our discussions to the typical suburban wood picket fence found in the markets where ONEprop has a presence.

Builder grade fences are the lowest quality; most builders use landscape timber for posts and yellow pine for pickets. These materials do not have adequate protection against the weather and wind, they may look good right after installation; however, they show signs of age within 1 to 2 years and may complete deteriorate within 5 to 7 years.

Because fences are an expensive item to replace, some investors have pushed it down in the priority list. However, the cost of constant repairs, vacancy caused by poor curb appeal and tenant complaints may be enough to justify the investment of building a quality fence that will last.

ONEprop's fence recommendations are based on experience living and working with many different fence configurations in the Dallas & Fort Worth areas. Our repair company, PRS, works with a limited number of fence contractors to insure they build quality and cost effective fences that help our clients achieve financial goals for their investment properties.

Regardless of whether you use PRS or your own fence contractor, we strongly urge you consider fences built to one of the specifications detailed below. This document explains our recommended 3 types of fences, A, B and C and the FAQ section at the end answers additional questions you may have. If you need further information, please contact Alex Capeto of PRS prs@ONEprop.com or your property manager.

“C” fence:

The frame consists of treated 4” x 4” posts set 8’ apart and 3 treated 2” x 4” stringers (rails) per section. Posts are set in concrete, a minimum of 2 feet below ground level. Pickets are cedar, grade 1 or grade A, set side by side, 1” above ground level

This fence is typically installed if you intend to own the property less than five years, but it will still look very good five years after installation. Having the pickets at ground level with no additional barrier can allow water and/or bug rot in to start developing in the pickets sooner than with a “B” or “A” fence. (If you sell the property to another investor/owner this “C” fence will bring less value to the new owner, though a typical owner who buys and occupies the home within 5 years will not usually know a difference)



“B” fence:

Identical to the “C” fence with the addition of a 2”x 6” to 2”x 10” treated baseboard around the complete structure, raising pickets off the ground. The base is also used to accommodate minor elevation changes so the top line of the fence is more consistently level and adds height for increased privacy.

This fence should be installed if you intend to own the property more than five, but less than ten years. Raising the pickets above ground level with treated lumber adds a barrier which will prevent water and/or bug rot. Between 5-10 years a treated post will generally start to twist, creating a need for minor repairs, but overall the integrity the frame should remain intact. A “B” fence will typically cost 10% more than a “C” fence.



“A” fence:

This is identical to the “B” fence but uses thick-walled metal posts to replace the treated 4” x 4” posts.

We strongly urge this specification on any property you intend to own ten years or longer. Texas winds dictate the use of the thickest posts, and combined with proper installation, this fence should last twenty years or more with only minor repair costs. An “A” fence will typically cost 10% more than a “B” fence.



FAQ's:

Why did my original fence only last five years?

Fence costs can be easily trimmed by using inferior materials having a useful life less than five years. You will see the use of non-treated lumber for posts, such as landscape timbers as a way to cut costs. These will rot in the ground and will start requiring repairs or replacement in a 3-5 year time frame. The stringers (the wood between the posts that the pickets are nailed onto) used in less expensive fences are 2" x 3" instead of 2" x 4". The smaller stringers sag within five years causing the pickets to fall off, and if these are untreated they will also rot. A rotted stringer will no longer hold the pickets because there is nothing left to hold the nails. The third component is the pickets themselves. We recommend unstained cedar. Cedar contains natural oils to prevent rot and bug infestation. A less expensive fence will use untreated pine, which has a useful life of 5-7 years.

Should I treat the fence with stain?

Unless required by a homeowners association we recommend the use of unstained cedar pickets to avoid the ongoing costs associated with staining and should lower your overall cost of ownership. To bleach and re-stain a fence will cost between \$0.40 & \$0.80 per square foot. Re-staining needs to be done every five to seven years to maintain the protective qualities of the stain. If your fence is not cedar or a treated wood, then you might consider a plan of regular staining in order to extend the life of the fence. If your posts and stringers are not of treated wood, then you should forgo staining, since the frame of the fence will expire and need to be replaced at about the same time as unstained pickets?

Should I use pressure treated pickets or natural cedar?

Our experience with treated wood for pickets is that it should have a useful life similar to, or slightly longer than cedar. The disadvantage with treated pickets is a tendency to shrink, leaving gaps in a fence and negating the privacy that is one of the primary intentions of the fence. Aesthetically a cedar fence is preferred over one made of treated wood at a similar price.

Am I required to have a fence?

The answer is generally no, however most of our homes are in suburban areas where the preponderance of homes have privacy fences. Many neighborhoods do require fences. If you have a pool, a fence is generally a requirement, and the gates must be self closing to prevent small children from entering the yard. Another consideration is that many of the renters in this market have children or outdoor pets. A quality fence increases the marketability of your home and increases the likelihood that tenants will find long term comfort in your home. Our opinion, as a realtor specializing in managing homes over the long term, is that a functional fence will have a strong positive impact on the marketability of your home.