

Fence etiquette prevents disputes

People fortunate enough to own their own plots of land often choose to fence in their pieces of paradise. Fences serve many purposes: to designate property boundaries, keep pets or children contained in a safe environment, corral livestock, offer privacy or add aesthetic appeal.



Although installing a fence may seem like the right idea for you, going about it the wrong way may lead to problems among neighbors, particularly if you live where the houses are relatively close to one another. Some homeowners find fences become the final point of contention among disagreeable neighbors or create tension with a neighbor with whom you previously had a good relationship.

There are certain things you must do and should do if you plan to erect a fence. Most people find neighbors appreciate being informed of any decisions you are thinking of making to the property that can affect their views or their adjoining property. Before drawing up fence plans with a contractor, talk to the neighbors on either side of your home and gauge their receptiveness to a fence.

Explain your case for the fence. Most neighbors are receptive to the idea if they know the reasoning -- especially if the desire for a fence is not to keep them at bay. It's hard to protest a fence that is a safety precaution for children.

Once you notify your neighbors as a courtesy, there are certain steps to take that will prevent any legal disputes down the road. The best way to prevent this is to apply for a new, professional property survey and have property lines indicated with paint or wood markers.

Each town or city has different regulations with regard to fencing, so it is important to learn the ropes or hire a contractor who is familiar with the rules. It might be illegal to install fences directly on the property line. The law might require the fence be installed a few inches inward. There also may be rules about how high fences can be in the front of the home, sides and back.

Once all the details are checked, you may have to apply for a fence permit. If the fence is installed by code, there is little chance it will have to be torn down or changed in the near future. Also, doing it by the book means that a neighbor can be unhappy about a fence but not have legal recourse to ask you to remove it.

As an added form of courtesy, it is proper fence etiquette to put the "good" side of the fence facing the neighbors' yards. That means the side of the fence that doesn't show the support panels and posts. Remember, it is your fence so you are also responsible for all maintenance of the fence -- on all sides. Just because your neighbor also will be benefiting from your fence, doesn't mean he will have to care for it.

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