

Fence Guide



Tips for Hiring a Fence Company

Things to consider

Questions you should ask

How to hire a fence company

How to tell if they are qualified

Tip-offs to potential rip-offs

How to find a good fence company in the Plano area

So you have decided it is time to replace that old privacy fence around your yard, or add a new fence. Whether you are replacing an old fence or building a new one for the first time, there are many things to consider when making this important decision.

Things to consider when looking for a good fencing company:

1. How long has the company been doing business?
2. Does the company carry liability and workers' compensation insurance?
3. Get two or more recent references, which you can drive by and view their workmanship first hand or speak with the owners.
4. Get at least two or three other bids, so you can compare not only price, but which one offers the most value for the money. Cheapest is not always the best.
5. Find a fencing company that will come out and take measurements and discuss options before giving you a price, because you will need to have an accurate estimate to make a good decision.
6. Get a written contract so you know the total you will pay before work begins.
7. What are their payment terms?
8. What is their warranty?
9. What is the estimated time of completion?

The best place to start asking about fencing companies is your family, friends and especially your neighbors.

Other good sources of referrals include other contractors, real estate agents and your local lumber supply store. Your city may even be able to provide a list of recommended fencing companies who are familiar with the codes in your area. Your Home Owners Association may have restrictions on what kind of fence can be built, as well as colors. It's always best to find out this information before you begin construction. They may also require you to submit plans, colors and an estimate to their architectural committee for approval before you begin.

Good questions to ask referral sources:

Were you happy with the quality provided by the fencing company?

Everybody has their own ideas of quality, so you should take a look at their fence and judge for yourself. Pay attention to see if the fence posts are straight. Are there visible cracks between the boards that should overlap? Do the gates operate properly? How does it look...visually? If painted or stained, does the color look consistent? Does it feel solid?

Did the fencing company clean up after themselves?

Did they remove the old fence, and leave the yard clean after doing the work? Did they pick up nails or screws from the yard? If you are left to clean up after them, this will cost you more time, money and frustration.

Were they courteous and polite?

This is a very important consideration. The entire experience, from beginning to end, needs to be as stress free as possible. Plus if the fence builder enjoys their job, the quality and attention to details will be better. The customers attitude can and will affect the entire fencing job. Hopefully this will be the first question you ask. If the answer to this question is "no" then do not go any farther, you don't want to work with that person.

Is a warranty included?

If a warranty was included find out if it has a reasonable amount of time before expiring, 10 years is enough, and if it has any value. Simply stating a warranty isn't enough. Get it in writing and understand its limitations! A good fence company is happy to stand behind their warranty. Good fence companies use quality materials and know their level of expertise. If a company will not offer a warranty this is a red flag.

How to Hire a Fence Company

Think about the last time you purchased a car. Chances are you didn't go to the yellow pages, choose a dealership at random, and buy your car from the first lot you visited. Many times, though, this scenario describes the way homeowners find a fence company -- they look in the phone book and call the company with the largest ad or the first one listed. But much like purchasing a car, finding a qualified fence company requires research and comparison shopping.

Ask Questions

WILL THEY PULL THE PERMIT?

Will the fence company pull all necessary permits and follow city and state permitting requirements as required by law.

WILL THEY CALL THE UTILITY COMPANY TO STAKE OUT BURIED LINES?

Reputable fence companies will schedule with Dig Tess as required by the State of Texas to have your property marked to identify underground utility lines.

Call before you dig, @ 1-800-344-8377

ARE THEY RESPONSIBLE FOR SPRINKLER HEADS?

Homeowners are usually responsible for marking or pointing out sprinkler heads and underground sprinkler lines, but always ask the fence company to be sure.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS IF I OWN A SWIMMING POOL?

If you own a swimming pool, there are special requirements that you will need to be aware of. This can be found on your city's website in the permits and inspections area.

HOW DEEP DO YOU SET YOUR POSTS?

Posts set 2.5 to 3 feet should be sufficient, but should be set in concrete. Deeper is always stronger.

HOW FAR APART ARE THE POSTS SET FROM EACH OTHER?

Generally, posts are set six (6) feet apart. Sagging can occur over time if posts are set too far apart.

WHAT TYPE OF NAILS OR SCREWS WILL BE USED?

Galvanized ring-shanked nails are the most common, and do not come out or rust. Screws can be used, but require more time and labor, which will add costs to the project. Do not use aluminum nails, as they are not strong enough.

WILL THE FENCE BE DIPPED OR STAINED ONSITE?

Dipped in stain is better because all areas of each board get soaked with stain, whereas if sprayed on site, only the exposed boards get stained or sealed. Dipped staining lasts about 30% longer, which means you won't have to re-stain as often.

Ask For a Quote

Invite fence contractors to look at the job and ask for a quote in writing. In the quote also ask them to specify the time it will take to complete the job. Ask what their backlog looks like...how soon can they start and how long will it take to complete. Make sure the contractors are quoting on the same specifications -- linear feet, like materials, posts, wood, stain, gates, etc.

Execute a Contract

Execute a contract specifying the work to be done, total cost, payment schedule, start date and estimated completion date. Make sure the contract includes whether the fence will be stained or not. Make sure the contract specifies that the fence company is responsible for cleanup and the removal of your old fence.

Things to Look For in a Qualified Fence Company

There are a number of qualifications which can set a professional fence company apart.

- **Insurance** -- Be sure that the prospective fence company you are considering is fully insured, having both workers' compensation and liability insurance. Your selected contractor should be able to provide you with a copy of his or her insurance policy.
- **Better Business Bureau** -- Contact your local Better Business Bureau to ascertain if any complaints have been filed against your potential candidate. <http://www.bbb.org/>
- Use **Angie's List** <http://www.angieslist.com> to see what others have to say about this company. If a fence company has good reviews on Angie's List then it is a good bet they will do good work for you too.

Safety Commitment

Accidents can happen with almost any home improvement project. So ask your prospective candidate what steps he or she will take to prevent injuries and property damage. Again if a contractor is good at his work he or she will be able to answer this question with ease. They have attention to detail and a cognizant of this when working.

TIPS

- * Small fence companies will be much more affordable because their overhead is lower.
- * If it's a big job, ask a number of fence companies and discard the cheapest and most expensive options. The cheapest will have underestimated and will sting you for it later and the most expensive doesn't really want your business, probably because they have work up to their eyeballs already.

Other Resources

- [Plano Utility Company Listings](#)
- [Residential Fence Permit – Requirements](#) (Plano)
- [Miscellaneous Simple Permit Application](#) (Plano)
- [Plano Online Permits / Inspections](#)
- [Better Business Bureau](#)
- [Angie's List](#)
- [American Fence Association](#)

Tips-offs to Potential Rip-offs

Whether you are planning a small repair project, like repaving your driveway, or a more extensive project, like adding a family room to your home, it pays to look beyond the lowest bid when selecting a contractor.

Right from the start, you can eliminate what are likely to be less-than-reputable contractors by considering a list of traits common to rip-off artists. Both the Federal Trade Commission and the Better Business Bureau have found the following to be indications that a contractor may not be interested in satisfying customers:

- **Solicits door-to-door:** Be suspicious of contractors who attempt to gain business by visiting door-to-door. "Cold calls" can sometimes mean that the contractor is not from a local, established business but is instead just passing through and trying to make a quick buck.
- **Has materials left over from a previous job:** It is not your lucky day when a contractor shows up on your doorstep offering a cut-rate price on a project because they have materials left over from a recent job at your neighbor's house or the house "down the street." This is a common ploy of fly-by-night operators or handymen who are based out-of-state and use their pick-up trucks as their place of business.
- **Asks you to get the required building permits:** This could be a sign that the contractor is hoping to avoid contact with the local agency that issues such permits. Perhaps he is not licensed or registered, as required by your state or locality. A competent contractor will get all the necessary permits before starting work on your project.
- **Does not list a business phone number in the local directory:** This can be a red flag indicating that the contractor does not have an established business presence in-state. Or, that he perhaps relies on a home answering machine to "screen" customer calls.
- **Pressures you for an immediate decision:** A reputable professional will recognize that you need time to consider many factors when deciding which contractor to hire. You will want to check references; look into the contractor's standard of work and his professional designations and affiliations; verify his insurance; check to see if he needs a license (and if so, that it is valid); get written estimates from several firms based on identical project specifications, and, contact the Better Business Bureau and local consumer protection agency to see if they have information.
- **Asks you to pay for the entire job up-front or demands only cash:** Whatever the reason, never pay for the entire project upfront. Payments should be by credit card or check so that your credit card statement or cancelled check can provide proof of payment, if needed. Do not pay anything until after the first day of work, and then pay up to one-third. Make additional payments during the project contingent upon completion of a defined amount of work. Do not make the final payment or sign an affidavit of final release until you are satisfied with the work and have proof that the subcontractors and suppliers have been paid.
- **Suggests you borrow from a particular lender:** Do not agree to financing through your contractor or someone he suggests. Many people have been ripped off when they agreed to use the suggested lender; sign a lot of papers in a rush; and find out later that they had agreed to a home equity loan with a very high rate, points and fees. Secure financing on your own by shopping around and comparing loan terms.