

## How to Avoid Fence Post Problems

The fence post will be the backbone of your fence. It should exhibit three major characteristics: stability, survivability, and straightness.

### **Stability:**

Typically 1/3 of the fence post should be anchored underground. Therefore, if you want a 4-foot tall post above ground, start with a six-foot post. Before beginning to dig, check to avoid ledges, rocks, buried cables, water pipes, leach fields, and septic systems.

Oftentimes you don't need to even dig a hole. Thrust a long iron bar down into the same spot. It should be going a little deeper each time. After it goes through the ground a foot or two, grasp the top of the bar with both hands and rotate it as if you were stirring a witch's cauldron. Place your sharpened fence post into the tunnel you just created and pound it in.

### ***Pounding the posts:***

Take caution when pounding the post into the ground. If you are using a 16-pound sledgehammer or maul be sure the head isn't loose and the handle isn't cracked just below the head. Position yourself so that the head of the hammer will hit the post at about the level of your waist. You should stand on something stable such as the back of a pickup truck to start each post. Face the pole directly, spread your feet apart, get balanced, and look at the spot you want the maul to hit the post. Watch carefully as you're striking the post; don't blink and wear protective glasses.

### ***Planting the posts:***

If you're unable to punch a hole with an iron bar, you can just plant your posts. Use an iron bar to loosen the dirt and rocks, and a shovel to empty the hole. You don't need sharp posts to use this method. Frost is less likely to heave this kind of post.

### ***Using Concrete:***

If you want an extremely solid post, use a wide ring of concrete at the base. Place the concrete in an open collar around, **not under**, the post so that the moisture can drain down along the post as the post shrinks or decays with age. Avoid sticking the post in concrete like one would stick a candle in frosting. This would create a moisture chamber around the post and would lead to the post's deterioration.

Mix the concrete on the dry side using two parts of cement, three parts of sand, and five parts of gravel with just enough water to make the mixture fluid but still firm.

Make the top of the hole two or three feet wide, mix the concrete, put the pole in position, and pour concrete around it. Nail small flanges or cross pieces to the bottom of the post before putting it in position to increase the bond between a post and the concrete. Smooth the surface of the concrete making it so the

highest point is next to the post. This will allow the water to drain away. It's good to let the concrete for a day or two before using the post.

### Survivability

There isn't a post that will resist rust or rot forever. Post rot occurs at the ground level because that's where food supply, oxygen, and moisture is ideal for the growth of fungi. Woods decay at different rates depending upon the soil they're in and the amount of natural fungus-retarding chemicals present. See chart for information on the durability of commonly used woods for posts.

A weak wood like maple can be turned into a strong wood with a variety of techniques. You can place the lower half of the fence post in the fire logn enough to produce a layer of char.

People used to soak the posts in penachlorophenol or creosote, but the US Environmental Protection Agency placed restriction on using this to people who have passed a course on the safe handling of hazardous materials. Due to this, we recommend the use of copper naphthenate. Just follow the directions given on the container. It's best to dip the wood into the liquid rather than being painted. Do this in the shade, and before it's painted.

<b>Durability of Untreated Hardwood</b>		
<b>Resistance</b>	<b>Tree Type</b>	<b>Life Expectancy</b>
Extreme Decay Resistance	Western Juniper Osage Orange	20-30 years
Good Decay Resistance	Sassafras White Oak Red Cedar Cherry	10 years
Poor Decay Resistance	Birch Beech Ash Elm Hemlock Hickory Maple Red Oak Poplar Willow	2 years

### Straightness

The poles need to be standing straight up in a straight line for both cosmetics and, particularly with wire fencing, because any post out of line will cause enormous stress. If it bends over, the wire along the entire fence will be loosened.

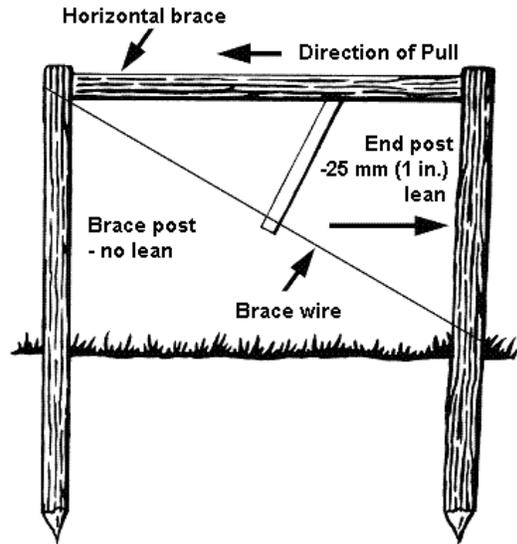
In order to obtain a straight standing post, use a carpenter's level.

To get the posts in a line, run two pieces of twine between two corner posts. Tie one at the bottom of both posts, and another near the top. Place the posts so that it just touches each string. Keep all the posts on the same side of the strings.

## **Bracing**

If you think there's going to be a post that will encounter more horizontal stress than others, brace it. Corner posts and gateposts should be braced with corner posts braced in two directions.

1. Anchoring post should be larger than the other posts and should be set deeper, if possible. Try to bury it about 3 ½ feet of an eight-foot post.
2. Set another large post four to six feet down the line.
3. Place a strong horizontal post between 2 posts approximately a third of the way down from the top of the posts. This horizontal post should be set in a dado joint, or at least blocked for stability.
4. Circle eleven-gauge wire twice around these posts, running it from the top of the bracing post to the base of the corner post. Twist the ends of the wire together and staple it to the post.
5. Insert a strip of wood at the midpoint of the bracing wire and twist it like a tourniquet to tighten the wire.
6. Anchor it with wire against the horizontal bar.



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For this information and more refer to [The Best Fences](#) ©1984 by James Fitzgerald.