

Need fencing? Think vinyl

If you're exploring the different options for new or replacement fencing, one material to be sure to have on your list of possibilities is vinyl. Vinyl fencing manufacturers have made great strides in recent years, offering a tremendous array of sizes, styles and options to choose from. The overall quality is up; the prices have come down; and competition among the growing number of manufacturers makes it a good time to consider vinyl for your next fence project.

Vinyl fencing is manufactured from polyvinyl chloride (PVC), blended with other chemical additives that add strength and protection from ultraviolet (UV) rays. Unlike wood, vinyl fencing is completely weather-resistant and virtually impervious to rot, insects, or other environmental damage. Another advantage to vinyl is that the color of the fence is created by the color of the vinyl itself -- it is completely through the vinyl, as opposed to a surface layer like paint that can chip, peel or wear off.

Vinyl fencing still is more expensive than wood, but the lower maintenance expense typically makes the lifecycle cost considerably lower. Vinyl also compares very favorably to aluminum -- vinyl has similar durability properties with a lower initial cost -- and is typically considerably cheaper than wrought iron. However, you have to want the look of a painted fence, since vinyl fencing materials are currently available only in white, tan and gray.

When shopping for vinyl fencing materials, remember that not all fences are created equal, and you typically get what you pay for. Carefully compare the manufacturer's specifications for the thickness of the vinyl, and look at how the components are constructed and structurally reinforced. Also, compare the length of the manufacturer's warranties, as well as how complete they are and what they cover.

STYLES AND OPTIONS

In a sure indicator of the rapidly growing popularity of vinyl fencing, there are an amazing number of styles and options now on the market to choose from. From traditional pickets to horse fencing to privacy enclosures, you will probably find a material available to match just about any style of fencing your imagination can conjure up. Some examples include:

- **Rail:** This is the style that pretty much launched the vinyl fencing industry. Rail fences consist of upright posts that are either square or round, with two, three or four horizontal rails between them. A variation of this style is the cross-buck, which has a horizontal top and bottom rail and two angled rails between them in an X configuration. Standard rails are rectangular in section, matching standard 2x6 lumber, but there are also round rails available that offer the look of a welded iron fence and provide additional protection for horses and other animals that may rub against the rails.
- **Picket:** Picture any variation of Tom Sawyer's famous fence, and you've got it. You can get picket fences in a variety of heights, and with pickets that are square, rectangular, round or octagonal, or that duplicate Victorian lathe-turned spindles. The tops of the pickets may be straight-cut, pointed, dog-eared, or rounded on top, or you may choose to cap them with any of a variety of caps from fleur de leis to balls.
- **Privacy:** Privacy fences are typically 5 or 6 feet in height, and consist of solid panels that mimic the

look of individual fence boards. Here again, there are dozens of board configurations that include traditional board fencing, good-neighbor styles, interlocking tongue and groove, and board-on-board styles.

- **Combinations:** If you're looking to match a particular fence style or trying to create a unique one of your own, you can combine many types of vinyl fencing. For example, you can top a privacy panel with lattice, or combine two different sizes or styles of pickets.

Installation of any type of vinyl fencing is pretty straightforward and requires only basic carpentry skills, but proper alignment of the posts is critical. Full installation instructions are provided from the manufacturer, so follow them carefully. Also, remember that there are building codes that apply to fences in certain applications, which may include such things as impact resistance and weight ratings -- be sure and discuss this with your fencing dealer and your local building department, and verify that the material you're using is correct for your particular application.

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