

Fences

Fences are constructed for a variety of reasons. They are generally used to restrict the movement of people and animals into or out of a parcel of land. Often they are placed to denote boundaries, delineate specific use areas, provide privacy or for aesthetic reasons. Common fence types are chain link, split rail, picket and board on board.



Privacy fences are often an essential feature of back yard landscaping. Not only do they solve the issues mentioned above, they essentially cover two additional objectives. First, they screen out unpleasant external sights and sounds that would otherwise intrude upon the senses. Second, privacy fences screen your movements from the prying eyes of others.

It isn't a question of needing to hide anything behind privacy fences. It's just that few of us want to live under a microscope. Remember the saying "good fences make good neighbors"? And whether referring to boundary lines or privacy fences, it's intent is just as valid today.

However, a privacy fence does not have to be a hardscape fence like the popular chain link or vinyl fences. Many homeowners prefer to opt for what is known as "living wall" privacy fences.

Hardscape privacy fences hold an advantage over their softscape counterparts on two points:

1. Speedy results: building wooden or vinyl privacy fences and masonry walls furnishes instant privacy. You will have to wait for plants to grow high enough to provide privacy.
2. Maintenance: well-built privacy fences or walls will rarely need to be tended to. Plants, by contrast, need to be watered, weeded, etc.

Nonetheless, planting "living-wall" privacy fences is often preferable to erecting masonry walls or wooden or vinyl fencing. Arborvitae, for example, commonly serves as such living-wall privacy fences composed of plants. Whether maintained as hedges or assembled less formally, they enjoy a number of advantages over their hardscape counterparts, including:

- Cost.
- Their beauty in terms of color, form and texture.
- Seasonal variation in some cases, ranging from spring flowers to autumn foliage.
- Zoning restrictions don't apply to "living walls" as frequently as to hardscape walls.

Some examples of "hardscape" and "living wall" fences include the following:



Picture of rose bushes grown to hide a chain-link fence.

Fence Requirements

The Code of The Township of Bensalem Pennsylvania was amended in February 2004 to include the following subsections. For the entire Ordinance [click here](#).

Sec. 232-583. Yard exception for private garages, accessory buildings and retaining walls.

(d) **Fences.**

- (1) Fences may be erected in any front, side or rear yard. Unless specified elsewhere in this ordinance, fences shall not exceed six and one-half feet in height.
- (2) Fences abutting a private driveway or located beyond the front building set-back line shall not exceed four feet in height.
- (3) Fences may be erected on properties that have multiple front yards, however, along the street line on which the principal building fronts, the fence shall not exceed four feet in height, and along the remaining front yard streets lines that do not abut a private driveway, the fence shall not exceed six and one-half feet in height.
- (4) In all cases, the height of the fence shall be measured from grade level.
- (5) In all residential districts, fences may only be of the following materials and construction:
 - a. Stockade fence of wood, with a wood frame, provided that the framework must face the interior of the lot. Stockade fences shall not be permitted on any residential front yard;
 - b. Ranch rail fence of wood, provided that the distance between each horizontal piece of the fence shall not be less than 12 inches;
 - c. Open metal mesh or chain link fence, supported by posts or frames of either pipe or wood, provided that the posts and frame must face the interior of the lot. In any residential front yard, no slats or other materials may be placed within the mesh or chain links of the fence so as to obstruct vision through the fence;
 - d. Wire, barbed wire, electrified fences and/or any other fences of similar material or construction shall not be permitted in any residential district; or
 - e. Any other industry acceptable material sold, distributed or otherwise used for the construction of a fence.
 - f. Any fence constructed or erected within a residential district of such materials as permitted in accordance with Chapter 232, subsection 583(d)(5) shall not be painted or constructed of brightly colored or multicolored materials, but shall remain neutral color to prohibit any offensive appearance to adjacent property owners.
- (6) In all other districts, fences may only be of the following materials and construction:
 - a. All materials and construction set forth in subsection (5) above;
 - b. Security fences not exceeding six and one-half feet in height may have an additional one foot of barbed wire installed above them only in industrial or institutional districts.
- (7) Notwithstanding the foregoing, on any property on which an apartment building or an apartment complex is located:
 - a. The owner of a property shall erect, install and maintain a fence on each boundary of the property, except any boundary which fronts on a public right-of-way, if any. The fence shall be a minimum height of six feet, and in no event shall exceed a maximum height of eight and one-half feet, and shall be of such construction, design and materials to obscure vision through it and to prevent the passage of litter, trash or garbage through the fence.
 - b. Permitted fences shall be of the following types of construction:
 1. Stockade fence of wood, provided that the distance between each horizontal piece of the fence shall not exceed four inches;
 2. Ranch rail fence of wood, provided that the distance between each horizontal piece of the fence shall not exceed four inches;
 3. Metal mesh or chain link fence, provided that the area of each individual opening shall not exceed two square inches. Slats to obscure vision may be inserted within the wire mesh or chain links; or
 4. PVC or other similarly industry accepted material for the construction of a fence.

- c. For the purpose of this section, an apartment building is defined as any building designed and occupied exclusively as a residence for three or more families. An apartment complex is defined as one or more apartment buildings that are constructed and located upon one or more common and contiguous parcels of land and/or which share a common popular name.
- (8) Swimming pools, spas and hot tubs shall be subject to the requirements of section 232-588 of this chapter.
- (9) All fences and walls must comply with the requirements of section 232-584 of this chapter relating to obstructions which prohibit any structure, wall, fence, planting or other visual obstruction between the height of two feet and seven feet above the level of intersecting streets being constructed or erected within any clear sight triangle for a corner lot.
- (10) No fence can be constructed for the purpose of cutting off the light or air of any adjoining property, nor constructed of unsightly materials for the purpose of annoyance or harassment.
- (11) Fences shall be subject to all of the requirements of the Township Property Maintenance Code.