

FENCE ME IN

Front yard appeal can be corralled in rails and pickets

By **Monica M. Walk**
Special to The Reporter

If your vision of homeownership includes a white picket fence out front, you are fortunate to live in a community that embraces this deep-rooted symbol of Americana.

And if your taste instead runs to Victorian-style wrought iron, rustic split rail, or sturdy chain link, you are still likely to be able to create the curb appeal of your dreams in Fond du Lac.

Unlike some communities, which prohibit front-

yard fences or have strict requirements for deep setbacks from public walkways, Fond du Lac's building ordinance and zoning code are downright fence-friendly.

Still, there are rules to abide by when planning a fencing project.

City of Fond du Lac Chief Inspector Guy Fox says adhering to height restrictions and fence density are key to a successful front yard fence.

Fences constructed in front yards can be a maximum of four feet high and must be 50 percent open, he noted.

(Corner lots — which essentially have two front yards — are subject to slightly different requirements, and a corner fence must drop down to three feet in height to ensure a vision clearance triangle for motorists.) Requirements change at the front wall of the home, and side-yard and backyard fences can be up to six feet tall and solid.

So the traditional picket fence — which typically has three-and-a-half-inch boards alternating with three-inch spaces — generally meets city code requirements for front-yard fencing. Many other decorative fence styles also fit the size guidelines.

"The finished edge of the fence can be at the edge of the lot line, but not on or over it," Fox said. "It can be at the inside edge of the (public) sidewalk."

No additional setback requirements mean maximum yard containment and a variety of landscaping possibilities to harmonize with the fencing.



Gary Soll of Searl Construction stands next to a wrought iron fence his company installed at Ondrasek Law Office, 195 N. Main St. (Patrick Flood/The Reporter)

According to Home Depot's blog, The Apron, vertical gardening is a growing trend in 2011, and fencing provides a backdrop for climbing flowers and fruits.

The finished side of the fence — the better looking side — must face the neighbors or the public right of way, Fox said. On a wooden fence, nails must face the owner's home.

Permit required

A bit more than correct sizing is required to complete a perfect fence project.

Fond du Lac homeowners need to apply for and purchase a permit before building. The application, made to the Inspection Service Division, includes creation of a simple site plan, showing the size of the lot and the intended location of the front fence, along with a description of the fence and an estimate of cost. Permit fees begin at \$39 for a basic fence and can run up to \$1,000, permit fees increase incrementally as the cost of the project increases.

(Additional information can be found on the website: <http://www.ci.fond-du-lac.wi.us/index.html?department=17>)

Fox urges homeowners to call his office at 322-3570 with questions about the

fence application or regulation process.

"Rather than guess, call," he said. "The call is free. If you do it wrong, then it's not free."

Knowing the location of underground gas, water and power lines also is paramount before beginning any fence project. Call local utilities to identify and mark these lines.

Handy help available

Help is available locally, whether you plan to design and build a fence on your own or hire a professional.

"Buying a fence at Menards is really easy and we have a wide variety of fencing options that are compliant with all local front-yard regulations, plus many other options to consider for your entire property," said Fond du Lac Menards General Manager Rocky Riedel. "There are several in-store displays, plus many other options to choose from in our special-order catalogs that provide product in a reasonable amount of time. We have special 'Design-it Kiosks' available to help guests design the fence they prefer, plus create material lists. We also offer convenient seven-days-a-week delivery on any item in the store, including fencing."

Menards in-stock fencing includes six- and eight-foot panels in the three- and four-foot heights needed for front yards.

While the store carries fencing ranging from treated wood to chain link, wrought iron, aluminum, PVC and split rail, Riedel

said he has seen increased consumer interest in composite fencing.

"UltraDeck fencing is made from recycled wood fiber, is resistant to insects, and long-lasting," he said. "The hickory colored fence gives you an authentic wood grain appearance without the maintenance of wood. There are all kinds of styles to pick from, plus traditional gates, brackets, caps and post sleeves to complete the job. Keep in mind that we have a great selection of related products such as arbors, foot bridges, pergolas and gazebos."

If digging post holes isn't on your list, hands-on professional help is available.

While Searl Construction, established in Fond du Lac in 1948 and owned by Mary Soll and her late husband Richard since the 1970s, sells a majority of chain-link product from its fencing division. Vice President Gary Soll noted his company is more apt to provide ornamental fencing in front yards, due to the "eye appeal."

Function guides form

The reason for the fence can aid in material selection. Protection from street traffic, privacy, and character or curb appeal lead to different options.

Even for a front yard with mandated height restrictions, homeowners may want to choose from fencing varying from three to three-and-a-half to four-foot tall, depending if the

fence "is strictly cosmetic versus keeping a dog in," Soll noted.

He also urges homeowners to consider the quality of materials when making a choice, noting that contractors and big-box stores have access to different materials. His company's offerings include PVC, wood, ornamental steel and aluminum that look like wrought iron, as well as chain link. Homeowners can supply dimensions, or Soll will visit the site and measure the area himself. Post holes are dug and set in one day, and left to cure for two days prior to installation. Fence panels are made in a warehouse, delivered to the home, assembled onsite and installed.

Since chain link is the cheapest per foot, some homeowners do select it for their front yards, Soll said, most often a vinyl-coated chain link in black, forest green or brown.

Soll offers a tip to local homeowners — particularly those living east of the Fairgrounds — pondering material choices for front yard fencing: "Some neighborhood covenants say you can't have chain link; it's the neighborhood, not the city ordinance. Sometimes it's a surprise to homeowners."

Freelance writer Monica M. Walk was raised in a Wisconsin family dedicated to the building trades. She dreams of an arbor, and is now pondering a stack of fence pickets stashed in her basement. Have a Home topic you'd like covered? Email walkthetalkcommunications@gmail.com



Monica Walk

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Arbors can't stand alone in Fondy front yards

Special to The Reporter

Cottage-styled gardens often beckon guests to enter through a rose-covered arbor, sometimes with a charming gate. If your front-yard fence plan includes an arbor nestled in greenery, your home improvement vision will bloom in Fond du Lac.

If you are contemplating an arbor without a fence for your front yard, head back to your drafting table: Arbors are not allowed in Fond du Lac front yards unless attached to a fence.

"Technically, a stand-alone arbor is not permitted in a front yard, but if it is attached to a fence, it meets code requirements," said City of Fond du Lac Princi-

ple said of homes with front-yard arbors and no fence.

Stand-alone arbors are allowed in rear yards. Residents desiring a stand-alone arbor in their front yard can put in an application for a variance, Dahlin said.

Variance applications are reviewed by the Board of Appeals at 3 p.m. on the first Monday of the month unless it is a holiday, said Chief Inspector Guy Fox. The fee for a residential variance with application is \$100. Homeowners are expected to attend the meeting and explain why they cannot comply with the zoning code.

Playground and laundry drying equipment also are relegated to back yards.