

Fencing Options for Dogs

A variety of fencing options can secure your dog and your garden.

Cheryl S. Smith

Inevitably, a landscape with dogs includes boundaries. The most common type of boundary is a fence. But “fence” is a big term, with many variations in wood, cyclone fencing, wrought iron, plastic, mesh, stone, and artificial stone.

Do you want fencing to keep your dog in? Keep in mind that a fence is not a fail-safe device — countless dogs have learned to chew through, dig under, climb over, or otherwise defeat fences. Or do you want to keep your dog out of a particular area? Would you like your fencing to be an architectural element in your landscape, or to fade into the background? And there’s cost to consider.

For safety, consider the following: Are there children in your neighborhood who might climb over a low fence after a ball? Are there others who might taunt your dog by pushing sticks through the fence or throwing rocks into the yard? Will your dog bark endlessly if she can see the world going by? Are you committed to checking the fence for any developing weak spots?

Cyclone fencing is relatively inexpensive, and although not exactly beautiful in its usual silver, it can blend in much better when painted black. Not many dogs will chew through metal, but some canines can climb the crisscrossed wires. Unless the fence is trenched and installed a foot or more below ground, a dog can easily dig underneath it.

Wrought iron can add beauty to your yard, but it is also costly. Check the design to see if your dog can slip between the uprights. Most wrought iron is installed with space between the bottom and the ground to help resist rust, but that also makes it inappropriate for diggers.

Wood has long been the preferred material for fencing. The design possibilities are nearly limitless. You can choose the precise height you want, the type of wood — from redwood to bamboo — and anything from solid to woven to openwork. But, of course, dogs can chew through wood, so you must be alert for any demolition work. And unless you include a below-ground barrier of some sort, digging is still a possibility.

You can have a “wood” fence without all the upkeep, thanks to plastic. Plastic fences don’t deteriorate in the elements and don’t burn in the event of a fire. They aren’t as attractive a target for chewing. And with the rising price of wood, they can cost about the same. Depending on the design, your dog may still be able to climb over, squeeze through, or dig under this type of fencing.

Brick fences are pricey, but they’re definitely solid. Dogs can’t chew them, they’re not very climbable, and the material doesn’t deteriorate much over time. You can build the first rows below ground to prevent digging. This is a great option if you find brick appealing and can afford the initial outlay.

Stone boundary fences are rare, but stone or artificial stone borders on gardens within the yard can serve as clear reminders for your dog to keep out. With a little training, even a low stone border can be an effective “fence” around plants.

For temporary protection around new plantings, chicken wire is cheap, easy to install, and though unattractive, will serve its purpose. Remove the wire once plants are established, and supervise your dog’s behavior in the area.

Don’t think of fencing as “a necessary evil.” With some planning, it can both keep your dog safe and enhance your landscape.

Cheryl S. Smith’s book, *Dog Friendly Gardens, Garden Friendly Dogs* (Dogwise, 2003, \$19.95), focuses on combining dogs and gardens successfully. You can visit her website at www.writedog.com.