

Most fence replacement jobs look simple from the driveway. Panels are leaning, posts are loose, and the homeowner wants a clean new line installed before the next season. Then the crew starts pulling posts and the real job appears underground. Old concrete footings are often the part that changes the schedule, the labour, and the final fence installation cost.



If you are planning a fence replacement, especially on an older property in the Greater Toronto Area, concrete footing removal deserves more attention than it usually gets. It affects where the new fence posts can go, how straight the finished line will be, whether existing landscaping survives, and whether your fence contractor can reuse the original layout or has to adjust it. In many cases, footing removal also determines whether a project remains a straightforward backyard fence installation or turns into a demolition-heavy rebuild.

Homeowners usually focus on fence styles, fence panels, fence gates, and fence materials. Those choices matter, of course. But before a new fence installation begins, the old foundations under the posts need to be dealt with properly. That is where experience shows. A seasoned fence company or fencing contractor can often spot, within minutes, whether the previous installer set the posts shallow, poured oversized footings, buried debris in the holes, or improvised around roots and utilities.

## Why old footings become a problem

A failed fence rarely fails only at the visible part. Wood rots near grade, chain-link fence posts loosen, and ornamental metal sections start leaning, but the hidden issue is often the same: the footing and the soil around it no longer support the load as intended. When you remove the old fence, you are not just taking out boards or wire. You are uncovering the structural decisions made years ago.

Older residential fence contractor work sometimes includes undersized concrete around wood posts, especially for quick privacy fence installation jobs where the goal was speed. On the opposite end, some past installers used massive concrete bells around every post, thinking more concrete always meant a better result. Those oversized footings can complicate old fence removal because they are too large to pull cleanly with light equipment, yet too close to hardscape, sheds, air conditioning units, or neighbour gardens to break carelessly.

In Ontario, frost adds another layer. Freeze-thaw cycles shift soil, hold water against posts, and expose installation shortcuts over time. A local fence company that works year after year in Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham, Oakville, Burlington, Whitby, and Oshawa learns quickly that footing practices that might survive in milder climates do not always hold up here. Durable fencing Ontario homeowners expect depends on solid post foundations and realistic site planning.

## **Not every footing should be removed the same way**

This is where many fence quotes become misleading. One fencing company may assume a simple extraction of old posts with minimal concrete left below grade. Another may price full concrete footing removal, soil cleanout, and disposal. On paper, both estimates can look like they cover the same fence replacement. In reality, they do not.

There are several common scenarios. Sometimes the post pulls out and the concrete comes with it in one piece. That is the best-case outcome. More often, the wood snaps off at grade and leaves the footing buried. Metal posts can be even more stubborn if rust has bonded them inside the concrete. In some older chain-link fence installer jobs, the line posts come out reasonably well but terminal posts and gate posts are set in heavy concrete and resist everything short of mechanical demolition.

A smart fence installation company will decide early whether the old footing should be extracted completely, broken and removed partially, or left in place while the new fence line is shifted slightly. That decision is never just about convenience. It depends on the new fence design, the spacing required between fence posts, the available room on the property boundary fence line, and whether there are legal or practical constraints along a shared property line fence.

## **What affects the difficulty of concrete footing removal**

The labour involved can vary wildly from one yard to the next. Two homes on the same street can produce very different conditions below grade.

The biggest factors are usually these:

1. Footing size and depth
2. Post material and condition
3. Soil type and moisture
4. Access for tools or small machinery
5. Nearby obstacles such as roots, patios, utilities, or retaining walls

That short list explains why a fence installation estimate prepared from photos alone can miss the mark. Clay-heavy soil in parts of the GTA holds onto buried concrete tightly. Sandy soil may release it more easily, but it can collapse around the hole and create more cleanup. Wet ground helps in some cases and hurts in others. Tight lot lines, common in older Toronto neighbourhoods, can turn a manageable removal into a hand-digging job.

I have seen a simple six-post replacement stay on schedule because every old footing came out with a post puller. I have also seen a modest backyard fence installation lose half a day because one gate post had been set in a concrete block so large it looked more like a deck pier than a fence footing. That kind of surprise is common enough that any careful fence contractor should leave room for contingency in the scope.

## **Pulling versus breaking, and why the difference matters**

Homeowners often ask whether the crew can just cut the old posts flush and set new ones beside them. Sometimes that is possible. Often it is not the best choice.

Pulling a footing intact keeps the new fence line cleaner. It gives the fence installers a fresh hole, more predictable spacing, and better control over alignment. For a privacy fence installation or good neighbour fence, where visual symmetry matters from both sides, clean post placement makes a real difference. The rails line up better, panels sit more evenly, and the finished run looks intentional rather than patched around buried obstacles.

Breaking a footing in place can be the right call when access is tight or the concrete is simply too large to extract without damaging surrounding areas. A professional wood fence installer or vinyl fence installer may break the top portion out, remove enough mass to clear the new post location, and backfill or offset as needed. That can be perfectly sound when done deliberately. It becomes a problem only when the choice is driven by haste rather than engineering judgment.

Leaving an old footing untouched is usually the last resort, not the first. It can force awkward post spacing, compromise fence gates, or cause future trouble if the new post ends up too close to the old concrete mass. It also limits flexibility if the owner later wants an automatic gate installer, a wider opening, or a revised perimeter fence installation.

## **The hidden cost drivers homeowners miss**

When people ask for fence cost per foot, they are usually trying to compare fence company pricing quickly. That number can be useful, but it can also hide the real work, especially during old fence removal. Footing extraction is one of the main reasons.

The visible fence length may be identical between two projects, yet one costs more because of disposal weight, restricted access, or manual demolition. Concrete is heavy. Once you load broken footings, extra soil, and old posts, disposal and hauling become significant. If the crew needs to wheel debris through a side gate instead of using a machine, labour rises again. If the fence line planning requires protection for irrigation, pool decking, or mature gardens, production slows further.

That is why a serious fence quote should identify whether demolition includes full concrete footing removal or only removal of above-grade fence materials. If you are comparing a local fence company with another fencing company, ask exactly how they handle buried concrete. A lower number up front can become expensive if the contract leaves room for extras once the posts are exposed.

## **When footing removal changes the new fence design**

Sometimes the right answer is not to fight the old footing at all. It is to redesign the line intelligently.

A new fence installation may shift a few inches inward on private property to avoid a row of deeply embedded concrete masses. On a property boundary fence, that decision needs more care, especially if the existing fence sat on a shared property line fence between neighbours. In Ontario, where municipal by-laws, fence height rules, and the Line Fences Act can come into play, moving the line is not just a construction choice. It can affect cost sharing, maintenance expectations, and the relationship with the adjoining owner.

This matters most when the replacement is being discussed as a good neighbour fence. If both parties are participating, the fence contractor should confirm the intended line before removal begins. Once the old posts are gone and excavation starts, assumptions become expensive. I have seen minor disputes start because one side expected the new posts in exactly the same spots while the other assumed the contractor would optimize the line for cleaner installation.

For commercial fence contractor work, industrial fence contractor projects, and agricultural fence contractor layouts, old footings may also interfere with equipment access, swing clearances, or future service paths. Security fence installation and chain-link fence installer jobs often need precise gate geometry. You do not want buried concrete forcing a gate post off the proper centerline.

## Ontario-specific issues worth checking first

Before any demolition starts, the practical and legal framework matters. Ontario fence laws are not one single rulebook. Municipal by-laws, local fence permit requirements, pool enclosure standards, and lot-specific conditions all matter. If the replacement includes a pool enclosure contractor scope, gate hardware and self-closing requirements may be far more important than they are for a standard backyard fence installation.

Along a shared line, [fence installation quotes](#) it is wise to discuss the plan with the neighbour before the crew arrives, even if you are managing the contract yourself. That conversation does not need to be dramatic. It should simply cover where the new fence will sit, whether the old concrete will be fully removed, how access will work, and what happens to any disturbed strip between properties. A Toronto fence contractor or fence contractor Greater Toronto Area team that handles line fences regularly will usually encourage this early.

If there is any uncertainty about boundary location, settle that before excavation. Footing removal creates larger disturbances than simple panel replacement. Once holes are opened and concrete is extracted, moving the line later means rework.

## How a professional contractor evaluates the site

The best site visits are not flashy. They are methodical. A good residential fence contractor walks the line, looks for failed posts, checks grade changes, notes access width, and studies the old installation pattern. They ask about buried services, sprinklers, drainage, and any previous repairs. They also look for signs that the existing fence was rebuilt in sections over time, because mixed-age runs often mean mixed footing types underground.

A careful assessment usually covers the following:

1. Whether the existing footings are likely to pull intact
2. Where new post spacing needs to land for the chosen fence style
3. What equipment can physically reach the work area
4. How debris and concrete will be removed from the site
5. Whether permits, neighbour coordination, or utility locates are needed

That five-point review tells you far more than a quick price per linear foot. It is especially useful if you are deciding between fence repair or replacement. If half the old posts are failing and the remaining footings are inconsistent, partial repair often becomes false economy. By contrast, if the fence line is fundamentally sound and only a few gate posts have failed, targeted replacement may still make sense.

## Different fence materials, different footing demands

The kind of new fence you choose affects how aggressively the old footings need to be handled. A wood fence installer building a tall privacy fence installation usually needs accurate post spacing and solid bearing because wind load is significant. A vinyl fence installer also needs consistency, because vinyl shows alignment flaws quickly. A chain-link fence installer can sometimes work around minor irregularities more easily along straight sections, but terminal posts and fence gates still need strong, exact placement.

Ornamental metal fence systems often depend on precise panel widths that leave little room for improvisation. If the old concrete forces a post a couple of inches off, the panel may not fit without custom work. The same principle applies to automatic gate installer projects. Operators, hinges, and latch hardware require exact geometry. Skipping proper concrete footing removal on those installations can create years of adjustment issues.

For low maintenance fence options, many owners assume the challenge ends once they switch from wood to vinyl or metal. Maintenance drops, yes, but installation precision becomes more important, not less. Durable fencing Ontario weather can punish starts below grade long before the visible material shows any issue.

## **What homeowners should ask before signing**

You do not need to manage the work like a contractor, but a few direct questions can save trouble later. Ask whether the quote includes full removal and disposal of old concrete. Ask what happens if buried footings are much larger than expected. Ask whether new fence posts will go in the same locations or whether line adjustments may be needed. Ask how the crew will protect nearby landscaping and what access they require.

Those questions are especially important if you are requesting quotes from a GTA fence company, a Mississauga fence contractor, a Vaughan fence contractor, or any other local fence company working in dense residential areas. In suburbs with narrower side yards, access often determines the entire removal method. In older urban lots, surprises below grade are common. A contractor who answers clearly has probably seen the problem before.

It also helps to discuss timing. Concrete footing removal can slow a project enough that a one-day fence replacement becomes a two-day job. That is not necessarily a red flag. It is often a sign that the installer is planning realistically rather than promising speed and improvising later.

## **A note on safety and utility locates**

This part gets overlooked until it should not. Footing removal involves digging, prying, lifting, and sometimes breaking concrete in confined areas. Utility locates matter, particularly where previous owners may have added lighting, irrigation, detached garage feeds, or gate wiring. A pool enclosure contractor or automatic gate installer working later will also want a clean record of where new posts and conduits sit.

For homeowners, the practical takeaway is simple: do not treat old post extraction as casual demolition. If the site is congested, the footing is near a retaining wall, or the fence line runs close to buried services, experience matters. That is where a professional fence installation company earns its value.

## **When removal is worth the extra money**

There are times when full concrete footing removal feels like an avoidable expense. Sometimes it is. Often it is not. If the new fence is expected to last fifteen to twenty years, or longer depending on material, starting around compromised or poorly placed old concrete usually creates more cost later than it saves now.

Full removal is most often worth it when the new fence has tight spacing requirements, when a gate opening must be exact, when the old line is visibly crooked, or when future features such as lighting, automation, or upgraded fence gates may be added. It is also worth it when appearance matters. A cleanly rebuilt good neighbour fence or privacy fence installation looks and performs better when the post layout was not dictated by buried leftovers from a failed fence.

A reputable fence contractor will not push full removal on every job. They will explain where it matters, where partial removal is enough, and where a modest layout shift makes more sense. That judgment is one of the

clearest differences between a basic labour crew and an experienced fencing contractor.

## **The bottom line before you replace**

Concrete footing removal is rarely the glamorous part of a fence replacement, but it is one of the decisions that shapes everything that follows. It affects alignment, durability, labour, disposal, scheduling, and even neighbour relations. On many properties, especially older homes across the GTA, the old fence underground tells a much bigger story than the visible panels above grade.

If you are gathering a fence installation estimate, treat footing removal as a core part of the conversation, not an afterthought. Whether you are hiring a Toronto fence contractor for a residential yard, a commercial fence contractor for a perimeter fence installation, or a specialized chain-link fence installer for a security upgrade, ask how they plan to deal with the buried concrete. The answer will tell you a great deal about the quality of the new fence before the first post hole is dug.

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# Fence Installation FAQs for Ontario Homeowners

## How much does fence installation cost in Ontario?

Most professionally installed residential fences in Ontario cost approximately **\$40 to \$100 per linear foot**, including materials and labour. A typical 100-foot fence may cost about **\$4,000 to \$10,000**. Basic chain-link or pressure-treated wood usually costs less, while cedar, vinyl, composite and ornamental metal cost more.

## How much does a fence cost per linear foot?

Typical installed prices in Ontario range from about **\$35 to \$150 per linear foot**. Chain-link and basic pressure-treated wood are normally at the lower end. Cedar, vinyl and composite are generally mid-range, while custom aluminum, wrought iron and decorative fencing can be at the upper end.

## How long does it take to install a fence?

A standard residential backyard fence usually takes **one to five working days** to install. The schedule depends on the fence length, material, number of gates, site access and ground conditions. Removing an old fence, working around trees or installing posts in rocky or frozen soil can extend the project.

## Do I need a permit to build a fence in Toronto?

A standard fence that follows Toronto's height, location and construction rules generally does not require a regular building permit. Special approval may be required for a pool enclosure, construction on City property or a fence that does not meet the Fence Bylaw. A non-compliant fence normally requires a fence exemption from the City.

## How tall can a fence be in the GTA?

Fence-height rules differ between Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan, Markham and other GTA municipalities. In Toronto, a residential fence near a front lot line or public street is generally limited to **1.2 metres, or about 4 feet**. Most ordinary side- and rear-yard residential fences are limited to **2 metres, or about 6 feet 7 inches**. Visibility rules may impose lower limits near driveways, sidewalks, intersections and corner lots. Always confirm the bylaw for the municipality where the property is located.

## Can a fence be built on the property line?

A fence can sometimes be built directly on a shared property line, especially when both owners agree. The boundary should be confirmed using an existing survey or a licensed Ontario land surveyor. Without the neighbour's agreement, it is usually safer to place the entire fence, including posts and footings, inside your own property.

## Who pays for a shared fence in Ontario?

Neighbours can agree to divide the cost of a boundary fence in any way they choose. Ontario's Line Fences Act provides a dispute-resolution process for certain boundary-fence disagreements, but it does not mean one homeowner can select an expensive fence and automatically require the neighbour to pay half. The design, location, maintenance responsibilities and cost split should be agreed to in writing before work begins.

## Which side of the fence should face the neighbour?

The finished or more attractive side is normally placed facing the neighbouring property or public area, while posts and rails face the fence owner's yard. Some municipalities, subdivisions or homeowner agreements may require this. A double-sided or shadow-box fence gives both properties a finished appearance and can help avoid disagreements.

## **What type of fence lasts the longest?**

Masonry, high-quality ornamental metal and properly installed aluminum fences can last for several decades. Aluminum is particularly durable because it does not rust. Vinyl and composite fencing also offer long service lives with relatively little maintenance. Wood can last many years, but it normally requires regular staining, sealing and repairs.

## **What is the cheapest fence to install?**

Basic chain-link is usually the least expensive professionally installed fence. Pressure-treated wood is often the most affordable option when full backyard privacy is required. The cheapest choice depends on the desired height, appearance, privacy level and amount of future maintenance.

## **What fence material is best for Ontario weather?**

Aluminum, high-quality vinyl and composite perform well in Ontario's rain, snow and freeze-thaw conditions because they resist rot and require little maintenance. Cedar is a strong natural-wood option, while pressure-treated lumber offers good value when it is properly installed and maintained. Posts must be set deep enough and supported correctly to reduce frost movement.

## **Is it better to repair or replace an old fence?**

Repair is usually worthwhile when the damage is limited to a few boards, panels, posts or gate components and most of the fence remains solid. Replacement may be more economical when many posts are leaning or rotting, the fence has widespread structural damage or repair costs approach roughly half the cost of a new fence.

## **How do I measure the length of a new fence?**

Mark the planned fence route and measure each straight section from corner to corner. Add the measurements together to calculate the total linear footage. Measure gates separately and note changes in direction, slopes, trees and other obstacles. Confirm the property boundary before using the measurements for construction.

## **What factors change a fence installation quote?**

Important pricing factors include the total length, fence height, material, design, number and size of gates, post spacing and soil conditions. Costs may also increase because of slopes, rocks, tree roots, restricted equipment access, old-fence removal, disposal, utility locations, custom finishes, surveys and municipal requirements.

## **What time of year is best for fence installation?**

Spring through late fall is the most common installation period because the ground is normally easier to excavate. Late spring and summer can have longer contractor lead times. Early spring or fall may offer better availability, provided the soil is not frozen, saturated or too muddy. Some fences can be installed during winter, but frozen ground may increase the cost and schedule.

## **Does a new fence add property value?**

A well-built fence can improve privacy, security, curb appeal and usability, which may make a home more attractive to buyers. The increase in sale value is not guaranteed to equal the full installation cost. Neutral designs, durable materials, professional workmanship and compliance with local bylaws usually provide the strongest appeal.

Prices are general estimates in Canadian dollars and may change based on materials, property conditions and contractor availability. Fence bylaws vary by municipality. Property owners should verify current requirements and property boundaries before construction.

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