

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Fence Me In

By Cynthia Brian

“Good fences make good neighbors.” – Robert Frost



A crew builds a fence.

Photos Cynthia Brian

Growing up on a ranch we had all kinds of enclosures. Fences to keep the cattle in, fences to keep the deer out, coops for the chickens, hutches for the rabbits, paddocks for the horses, pens for the sheep, and extra corrals for the injured animals we would rehabilitate before release. What we didn't have were human fences.

While traveling to the East Coast and the southern states, I noticed a lack of fences between homes. Lawns rolled into one another, gardens meandered, play structures appeared to belong to no one or everyone. In the California sierras, the same mentality holds true for many homeowners. But in the cities and suburbs of California, strong fences create good neighbors, especially if you live near a house that reminds you of Miss Havisham's ruined mansion in Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations," albeit with abandoned cars on blocks, rusting washing machines, and a backyard piled



A mangy coyote on the hill.

high with trash. The sturdy redwood fence dividing your properties could be your sanity savior.

Here in our neck of the woods we experience a different kind of problem. Deer! With few predators and plenty of open space deer have been multiplying exponentially. This is not good news for gardeners. Of all the correspondence I receive from readers, the majority of the questions concern these trespassing foragers.

“What can I plant that deer won't eat?”

“How can I keep the deer from breaking my sprinkler systems?”

“What can I do to keep the deer out of my garden?”

Over the years I have written articles about our dear deer and after three decades of trying literally every trick suggested, I am convinced that there is only one answer.

Build a fence!

I decided to call several fencing companies to find out if they have experienced a rise in requests for deer fencing. The answer was a resolute “Yes!” Ryan Collins, the estimator for C & J Fencing, informed me that 95 percent of the calls he had been on in the last month were all related to building deer fencing. Despite the fact that C & J builds custom decks, arbors,

handrails and benches as well as offering ornamental iron and chain link, putting in redwood and galvanized wire deer barriers has become an important part of protecting landscapes.

If you are considering installing a fence, repairing, upgrading or replacing an old one, as a homeowner, what do you really need to know? I interviewed Collins more in depth and also tagged along on an installation. Here are some tips that I gratefully learned through the generosity of C & J as well as through my own observations:

1. Get recommendations from friends, family, or neighbors you trust.
2. Invite two or three legitimate companies to look at your location and bid your job. Ask how long each has been in business. Make sure all are licensed, carry Workman's Comp Insurance, General Liability Insurance, and Auto Insurance.
3. To be fair to all, make sure each estimator is bidding apples for apples. Show each of the contractors exactly where you want the installation. Share your expectations, and your fears, if any. Be clear about how high you want your fence. To keep the deer and coyotes out of your garden, seven feet is the recommendation.

... continued on page D18