

You finally decided. The backyard fence you have been talking about since the neighbor's dog discovered your flower beds is now a project with a deadline attached. Maybe the kids start school in September. Maybe the pool goes in this spring. Maybe you simply cannot watch the leaning chain-link endure one more winter. Whatever pushed you over the edge, your first instinct will be to fire off a few quote requests tonight and hire whoever answers fastest.

Slow down. Scheduling, lead times, and project communication determine how your fence experience actually goes, and you have more control over them than you think. A fence is not a product you order and receive. It is a construction project that lands in your yard on a specific day, in specific weather, with specific people moving around your property. Before you request a single quote, you should know your own timeline, your property's constraints, and the questions that separate a contractor who plans from one who simply shows up.

Why Scheduling, Lead Times, and Project Communication Belong in Your First Conversation

Most owners compare fences the way they compare kitchen appliances: price, finish, warranty. Then the project stalls for six weeks and nobody warned them. The schedule is the product. A well-built fence that goes in during your chosen window, with a crew that tells you what happens next, beats a slightly cheaper quote that arrives three months late and leaves a gate hanging on one hinge while you wait for a callback.

Lead times across the GTA run longer than most first-time owners expect, and they are not uniform. A contractor in Mississauga may be booking six weeks out while a crew in Oshawa has an opening next week, or the reverse. Seasonal demand, crew size, and how many jobs sit in the pipeline all move the number. Nobody can give you a truthful date until they know your scope, and you cannot evaluate their date until you know your own constraints. That is why the conversation starts before the quote, not after, and why the same questions should go to every contractor you call.

Know Your Own Calendar Before You Call

Write down the date you actually need the fence. Not the date you would like it, the date after which life becomes difficult: a dog that cannot be let out unsupervised, a pool inspection, a lease renewal, a backyard wedding in June, a tenant moving in at the end of the month. Contractors work backward from deadlines all the time, but only if you name yours. Owners who say "sometime this summer" get scheduled sometime this summer, and then act surprised.

Decide how much flexibility you have. Can the crew start midweek, or does the work need weekends because you cannot take time off? Are you willing to let the job proceed in stages if a ravine lot or a buried utility complicates one section? Your answers shape which contractors can realistically take the job. A two-person crew working evenings moves slower than a four-person crew with pre-built panels, and either can be the right choice depending on your window. If you have buried utilities or an easement on the property, ask what the crew needs to do before digging, since requirements vary by utility and municipality.



Pick Your Season Before You Pick a Contractor

Across Toronto and the surrounding municipalities, fence season runs like clockwork. Interest picks up in March, calendars fill through April and May, and by June most established crews book into late summer. Spring thaw turns the clay-heavy yards of Markham, Vaughan, and Richmond Hill into mud that makes post holes miserable and delivery trucks unwelcome. Owners who book in February or March get their pick of start dates. Owners who call on the May long weekend take whatever is left, and whatever is left is rarely the crew they wanted. The same curve shows up in every municipality in the region, from Hamilton through Newmarket, with only the depth of the backlog changing.

Fall is the quieter secret. Cooler soil, steadier weather, and lighter calendars often mean faster starts and better attention. Winter work happens too, but it depends on the ground; when frost runs deep, posts wait, and a January start can stretch into February. If your deadline has slack, ask what the shoulder season looks like. You may trade a short wait for a much better date.

The same logic applies to commercial work. A strip mall owner in Brampton who plans a parking-lot fence around a lease renewal in November can book the quiet months and get a crew that is not racing between six other sites. Landlords and facility managers who treat fencing as a winter planning item rarely regret it. Whatever season you choose, weather is the one variable nobody controls. A wet May across Peel can push start dates, and a windy stretch on the Oakville lakeshore can idle a crew for days. Build slack into your plan if your deadline is hard, and ask how the contractor handles weather-related shifts before you sign, not after.

How to Ask About Lead Times Without Sounding Like a Price Shopper

The question is not "how fast can you do it." The question is "how far out are you booking, and what does that number include?" A lead time quoted in weeks can start counting the day you sign, the day your deposit clears, or the day locates and approvals are confirmed. Those are very different dates. Ask directly whether the lead time includes the waiting period for utility locates, survey confirmation, and any municipal approvals your property needs.

A good estimator answers in layers: two weeks to schedule the survey, one week for locates, then a start window. Vague answers deserve follow-up. If a contractor says you will get in soon without naming a month, a season, or a range, you are not being quoted a schedule, you are being handed a hope. That distinction matters more than any discount, because a date you can plan around is worth real money even when the fence itself is not the expensive part of your year.

What to Tell the Contractor About Your Property and Your Availability

Your quote is only as good as the information behind it, and so is your start date. Tell the estimator everything that could slow a crew down: the locked gate that needs a key, the neighbor who parks against the line, the steep grade at the back of a ravine lot, the flower bed you just planted along the fence line, the underground sprinkler heads you cannot quite remember. Each one is a scheduling risk. If the crew discovers them on day one, your start date becomes a delay date. A crew that shows up ready for the site you described is a crew that was listening during the quote.

Availability cuts both ways. The crew needs you, or someone you authorize, reachable during working hours to unlock gates, confirm the line, and make small decisions on the spot. If you work downtown and cannot answer your phone until evening, say so up front. Contractors will often schedule the decision-heavy days around your availability, but only if they know about it. Parking matters too. A crew on a narrow street in an older Toronto neighborhood may need a clear driveway or a visitor spot, and that is a scheduling conversation, not an afterthought.

Comparing Quotes on Schedule, Not Just Price

When the quotes arrive, lay them side by side. Compare three things beyond the bottom line: the proposed start window, the estimated number of working days, and what each contractor says will happen if the weather turns. A quote that promises a June start without a word about a rainy May is incomplete, no matter how clean the number looks.

Ask how many crews the company runs and where your job sits in the queue. The honest answer may be that you are third in line behind two other jobs, which is a perfectly good answer if you know it. What you do not want is a contractor who takes the deposit, slots you behind six jobs, and calls it a weather delay when September arrives. Get the working-day estimate and the start window in writing. Schedule promises made verbally have a way of evaporating.

The comparison gets sharper on commercial work. A residential owner can absorb a two-week slip by rearranging a barbecue. A facility manager with a construction deadline, a security requirement, or a tenant move-in cannot. If your project feeds another schedule, tell every contractor that the fence date feeds a bigger date, and watch how their answers change. The ones who treat your deadline as their own are the ones to keep talking to.

A short checklist keeps the comparison fair:

1. Ask for the start window in writing, not just the price.
2. Ask how many working days the job should take, including an allowance for weather.
3. Ask where your job sits in the queue and how many crews run the company.
4. Ask what triggers a change to the start date, and how you will be told.

The Questions Worth Asking on That First Call

You do not need a long interrogation. A handful of questions, asked the same way to every contractor, tells you more than an hour of small talk. Write them down before you call so every estimator hears the same ones and you can compare answers fairly. Keep the list short enough that you actually ask all of it.

- How far out are you booking right now?
- Does that date count from today, or from when the paperwork clears?
- What usually pushes a start date back, and how do you handle it?
- How will you tell me about delays, and how much notice will I get?
- Who runs the job day to day, and who do I call with a question?

Notice what is missing: no question about the cheapest panel, no question about the fastest install. The price conversation will happen on its own. This first call is about whether the contractor can commit to a plan and communicate it, because those two abilities decide whether your fence shows up while it still matters.

What a Good Pre-Quote Conversation Should Settle

By the time you request quotes, you should be able to answer three questions yourself: when do I need this fence, how flexible am I, and what does my property require of the crew. Expect every contractor to answer three back: when can you start, how long will it take, and how will [Extra resources](#) you keep me informed. When both sides can answer those, the scheduling, lead times, and project communication fall into place, and the quote becomes what it should be: a price for a plan you understand.

One last thing. When a contractor communicates well before you have paid them anything, hold onto that. The way a company treats you during the free, low-stakes part of the relationship is how it will treat you when the posts are in the ground and the rain will not stop. A fence is built once, but the schedule and the conversations around it are what you live with from the first phone call to the final walkthrough. Choose accordingly.