

The following information about architectural styles is provided to help homeowners design a fence that harmonizes with the style and period of their historic home.

FENCES FOR DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Understanding how fences evolved from logs to pickets and then changed with the ebb and flow of architectural styles can help you choose a successful design.

As the dangers of the wilderness receded, fences became shorter and more refined and were mostly erected to contain livestock and establish property lines. In towns, the fence gave the residential streets a spatial definition with the fence. Fences were a semi-public extension of the dwelling.



Fencing for a **Gothic Revival** house (1850-1880) can reflect medieval influences with pointed-arch pickets and posts, or with palings and rails carved to resemble open tracery. For a more elaborate touch, finials might be carved like spires, and the gate could mimic a pointed arch with quatrefoil and trefoil patterns carved into its posts. Finishing with a dark-color paint or stain would also be appropriate.

from Anna Catlin, "Fence Guidelines for Albany's Residential Historic Properties (Albany: Oregon: City Community Development Department, 2009, 1-2)

full document can be accessed at:

<http://www.cityofalbany.net/images/stories/planning/historic/fences.albany.pdf>

The **Italianate** style (1850-1895) was aligned with the picturesque landscape movement that considered fences a necessary evil, so ideally they were as inconspicuous as possible. Italianate fences may borrow details from the corbels, cornices, or brackets on the house and should be painted a neutral earth color, not the bright white that the style's biggest proponent Andrew Jackson Downing, detested. However, in Oregon and Albany, fences were often painted white.

Builders during the **Victorian** era (1870-1905) ornamented their houses and porches with carved brackets, corbels, fretwork, and turned wood, but often wood fences were sedate and understated. Period photos often show smoothly carved, pointed, stone, or wood posts holding panels of square pickets painted in a neutral tone, so as not to upstage the house and grounds. A common form of picket fence design to enclose yards was three horizontal rails equally spaced, with short, pointed pickets that rise just above the middle rail, alternating with longer pickets that rise above the top rail.



Figure 2. Picket fence of irregular spindles. Henry Failing house. Completed 1875. Fence 1876. Portland, Multnomah County. Architect for both, Henry Cleaveland.



Figure 4. Gate centered on house with two entrances. Thomas Krewson house built about 1880, in North Drain, Douglas County, Oregon.

With less need to fence out the neighbor's livestock and more interest in integrating house and site, picket fences fell out of favor in the early 20th century with the interest in naturalistic landscaping that accompanied the **Craftsman** movements (1905-1930). Yards flowed together down the block and fences were used only in the backyards for utility.



The **Colonial Revival** and various **English-influenced styles** that became popular following World War I brought the picket fence back into popularity. These gave way in the 1940s to low, three to four foot tall chain link fence, which were affordable and took vines well, offering privacy.