



A new choice in fencing is the Living Wall — pictured above, just planted and seen fully grown, right and below.

PICKING YOUR PICKETS

Please fence me in

HEATHER M. O'CONNOR, SPECIAL TO QMI AGENCY — The snow is gone, builders are laying sod, and a new homeowner's thoughts turn to fencing. But how to pick your pickets?

Wrought-iron and its look-alike polymer, stone and masonry give a classy look but are too expensive for the majority of homeowners. Chain-link, either galvanized or plastic-coated, is maintenance-free, long-lasting and inexpensive but gives no privacy. It's well suited for green thumbs because it doesn't shade gardens and provides a lattice for climbing vines.

Traditional wooden fences fit the bill for most homeowners. This affordable, sturdy, renewable resource builds a long-lasting fence that affords a high degree of privacy. Most people choose pressure-treated lumber, which is typically spruce. Untreated, it weathers to a soft grey over time. Cedar — another popular choice — naturally resists decay but costs about 50% more. It also requires finishing to maintain its colour, says Derek Turberfield of Better Living Home and Garden Improvements.

A strong fence begins with a good foundation, which translates into four-foot holes with a crushed stone base for drainage.

"You don't want your posts sitting in water. If they do, they're going to rot," Turberfield says. He recommends getting multiple estimates and asking how deep they intend to dig. "If they say two feet, say: 'Thanks for coming over.' If they say three feet, ask why. The answer you want is four feet because of something called frost heave. If the posts aren't below the frost line, the frost can push them upwards."

Composite fencing is another option. This durable man-made lumber comes in different colours and resists



fading over time. A blend of recycled and reclaimed materials, such as plastic bottles and wood fibres, won't splinter, crack, warp or rot. Though manufacturers claim that it is mould- and mildew-resistant, some consumers find that's not always the case. It's also a significantly pricier option, more than double the cost of cedar.

A new choice for the environmentally conscious is the Living Wall. More like a large shrub than a tree, the non-invasive species of willow grows straight up two to five feet a year until they reach their maximum 15 feet, combining the beauty of a hedge with the low maintenance of a fence.

The fence is constructed with 4-by-4 posts connected by three crossbeams. The posts need no concrete. Three-year-old willow wands are woven a finger's width apart between the crossbeams and planted two to three feet deep in a trench filled with triple-mix. Within six weeks, the fence is fully green, creating an attractive privacy screen that lasts a lifetime.

"I've got it in my backyard," says Anthony Biglieri, president of The Living Wall. "It's a little oasis for me — the leaves, the birds that fly in and out, the squirrels that like to run across it. I like it in the winter, the way the snow sits on it ... and in the spring, summer, fall because it's always green."

Considerable watering is required throughout the first year. After that, it's virtually maintenance-free other than an annual trim with a hedge trimmer.

It's one of the first plants to bud and one of the last to drop its leaves, says Biglieri. Pets can't get through it. Graffiti won't stick to it. To top it off, it siphons pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions from the air.

With so many fencing options, the challenge is in the choosing.

