

Two fences went up on the same street in Ajax last summer. One owner hired a crew that spent a full morning on the property line, flagged the grade change, and set posts in drainage-conscious holes. The other owner picked the lowest number on a Friday and watched the new panels pull out of line by the following spring. Ask any experienced fence contractor what goes wrong on a job and you will hear the same short list every time. The uncomfortable part is that almost all of it was avoidable before the first hole was dug. These are the common mistakes with choosing a contractor for a new installation, what they cost you, and how to keep them from becoming your story.

Mistake One: Guessing Where the Property Line Runs

The most expensive mistake in fencing is also the most common: building on the wrong side of the line. Survey markers disappear under landscaping, corner pins get buried by years of topsoil, and neighbors disagree about where one yard ends and the next begins. A fence built on the neighbor's land is a problem that does not age well. It can be ordered moved at your expense, or it becomes the subject of a dispute that outlives the fence itself.

The fix is boring and cheap compared to the alternative. Order a survey if you do not have one, or at minimum locate the pins and confirm the line before you sign anything. Walk the line with the estimator and watch where the stakes go. A contractor who shrugs at the property line is telling you how they will handle every other detail of the job.

Mistake Two: Choosing Material on Looks Alone

Showrooms are designed to sell you the best-looking sample on the wall, and every material looks good under warm lighting with a perfect backing. Your yard is not a showroom. A windy lot in Oakville near the lake will punish a tall vinyl panel that was never meant to flex. A shaded run in Aurora that never dries out grows moss on wood faster than a sunny stretch in Hamilton does. Snow slides off one roof and piles against one section of fence all winter, and the material that shrugs it off is [Additional hints](#) not always the prettiest.

Choose material for the conditions it will live in, then for how it looks. Ask the contractor what they see on lots like yours. Ask how the material behaves in freeze-thaw cycles, in wind, in shade, and what it costs to maintain over ten years. Looks are the last filter, not the first one.

Mistake Three: Ignoring Drainage and Grade

Water is the quiet killer of fences. Low spots hold moisture against posts, clay soils expand and heave when they freeze, and a run that crosses a grade change collects runoff that rots the base of the fence years before the top fails. Owners notice when the gate starts dragging or a panel tilts, but the cause was set the day the holes were dug.

Talk drainage before the first hole, not after the first repair. Ask how the posts will be set, how deep, and what happens to water that runs toward the fence line. On a sloped lot, ask how the panels follow the grade and whether the contractor plans for the drainage the grade creates. The crews that treat water as a design problem are the crews whose fences stay straight.

Mistake Four: Forgetting What Is Under the Ground

Utility lines do not care that you are just putting in a fence. Hydro, gas, water, and communications lines cross yards in patterns that have nothing to do with the property line, and a post auger finds them fast. Hitting a line turns a fence project into a repair project, an emergency call, and a bill that has nothing to do with lumber.

Arrange for utility locates before any digging, and make sure the crew plans to work around the marks. On older Toronto lots and in subdivisions with services in the back, check for easements and confirm current requirements with the utility or your municipality. A fence that blocks an easement can be removed at the owner's expense when the utility needs access, no matter how new the fence is.

Mistake Five: Judging the Bid on Price Alone

The lowest number is often the most expensive quote you will ever receive. A bid that sits suspiciously below the others usually means a thinner grade of material, shallower holes, fewer posts, or a scope that quietly excludes disposal and cleanup. It is not a bargain. It is a down payment on repairs.



Compare line items, not totals. Check that every quote covers the same material, height, gates, and demolition, and ask what the price does not include. Be suspicious of anyone who quotes without walking the site. Site conditions are half the job, and no one can price them from a phone call.

Mistake Six: Skipping the Written Scope

A handshake and a verbal price sound like trust until something changes. Midway through the dig, the crew finds the buried concrete pad nobody mentioned, or the neighbor requests a different gate location, and suddenly the number everyone agreed on no longer applies. Without a written scope, the dispute is your word against theirs, and the fence is half built while you argue.

Insist on a written scope that names the material and grade, the exact run, the post spacing, the gates and hardware, the demolition work, and the cleanup. Any change during the job gets its own written confirmation before the work proceeds. The best contractors welcome this, because it protects them from scope creep exactly as much as it protects you.

Mistake Seven: Planning the Build but Not the Maintenance

Every fence has a maintenance life, and owners who ignore it end up replacing or repairing years early. Cedar needs sealing or staining on a cycle. Vinyl needs cleaning where it collects grime. Gates need hardware checks as they settle. For a commercial perimeter, the stakes are higher: a breach in a security line gets discovered by whoever tests it, and that is usually the wrong person.

Ask what maintenance your chosen material needs and when. If you will never stain a cedar fence, buy something that does not need it. If you manage a property portfolio, build fence inspections into the annual maintenance calendar, not into the emergency budget.

Mistake Eight: Treating the Gate as an Afterthought

The gate is the only part of a new fence that gets used every single day, and it is the part owners think about last. By the time the design conversation reaches the gate, most owners are out of decision energy, and the contractor's default takes over: a standard width, a stock latch, hinges chosen from whatever is on the truck. On a

residential lot that default might be fine. On a commercial site it can be a daily annoyance for tenants and delivery drivers, and on any property it is the most likely source of the first complaint.

The fix is to design the gate on purpose. Decide the width against what will pass through it: a mower, a wheelbarrow, a delivery cart, a skid-steer. Decide the swing direction against the grade and the wind. Ask how the gate is framed, what the hinges are rated for, and how the latch holds in wind and snow. A gate that is specified, not defaulted, is the difference between a fence that works and a fence that merely stands.

Commercial-Specific Mistakes

Commercial projects add failure modes of their own. Skipping the approvals process is one: strip malls, parking lots, and industrial yards answer to landlords, property management, and municipal processes, and starting without the paperwork invites a stop-work order mid-job. Ignoring access is another. A crew that cannot get a truck near the work area because of tenants, deliveries, and store hours will price the wait into the job or rush the work, and both show up in the result.

Security specs get underbuilt in commercial work too. A perimeter fence around an industrial yard needs vehicle-rated sections near loading areas, anti-climb details, and locks that survive weather and misuse. Under-specifying to win the bid is how loading docks end up behind a fence a hand truck defeats. Verify insurance and worker coverage with the contractor and your insurer before work starts, and get the maintenance plan into the contract, not into a handshake.

Red Flags to Watch For

- A quote delivered without anyone visiting the property.
- One-line pricing with no material, post, or gate detail.
- Pressure to sign today with a "discount that expires."
- No mention of drainage, frost, soil, or property lines.
- Vague answers about utility locates, easements, or municipal rules.
- A request for full payment before the work begins.

The Fix in Seven Steps

1. Confirm the property line with a survey or pins before you sign anything.
2. Match the material to the site conditions, not to the showroom.
3. Ask about drainage, frost, and soil on every quote call.
4. Arrange utility locates and check for easements before the first hole.
5. Compare scope line by line, and walk the site with each estimator.
6. Get the full scope, change process, and payment milestones in writing.
7. For commercial work, confirm approvals, access, security specs, and coverage in writing.

Final Word

None of these mistakes are exotic. They are the everyday failures that fence crews see on every street in the GTA, and every one of them is preventable with a survey, a walk-through, and a few direct questions. Choosing a

contractor for a new installation is less about finding a perfect company and more about refusing to skip the boring steps. Do the boring steps, and the fence will take care of itself for a long time.