

Keeping a Fence Upright - (Part 2 Paling Fence Project)

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Saturday, 07 April 2007
Last Updated Monday, 16 April 2007

Once the fence line is cleared you need to define the end points and any bends in the fence. Remove any existing posts at these locations and then dig new post holes. Mark out where the old fence line was so that the front face of the post or the rail can be positioned directly over the fence line or boundary. Digging a post hole

This sounds quite simple but there are numerous ways of digging a post hole and just as many tools to do the job. If you have over 25 holes to dig, then a mechanical post hole digger is a must. You will same time, be more cost effective and reduce wear and tear on your body.

A Powered augers like this one can be hired or bought at most good equipment suppliers but if budget and space allow hire a tractor or bobcat with an auger attachment to get the post holes dug the quickest way.

Augers are great for clear ground, but if the rocks in the ground are bigger than the space between twists in the screw of the auger you are going to have trouble. In these situations and mildly rocky ground you will have to resort to using a crowbar and spade. A heavy duty crowbar is an essential tool for working in heavy clay and rocky soil. It dislodges large rocks, and breaks up both clay and rock. My personal crowbar is 5' (1.5m) tall and weights in at 22 lbs (10 kg) with a point one end and a chisel at the other.

As the hole gets deeper you will need a tool like a clamshell digger to remove the dirt and rock from the hole. these are simple to use. You plunge its open jaws into the hole and then spread the handles to make the jaws grab the dirt and rock at the bottom of the hole. Then lift the dirt clear of the hole and close the handles to open the jaws and release the dirt. As the hole gets deeper however the clamshell diggers is less able to close its jaws and because of this I no longer use a clamshell digger and use a post hole spade instead.

Note: If you can't make headway with a crowbar and spade then wooden posts are not really suitable for this section of fence and an alternative should be sort.

If there are less than 25 holes to dig and the ground is easy, you can hand dig the holes. A post hole spade is the most common way but I find that the holes are often to wide at the top and narrow at the bottom which makes it difficult to make the post sturdy in the hole. Also digging a hole deeper than 2' is very time consuming using a spade.

Mostly I use a hand auger. My favorite is a hand auger handed down to me by my grandfather. It digs a perfectly round hole up to 3'6" (1.0m) deep and removes all the dirt in the process. The hole is 1' wide which is just perfect for most fencing needs.

Its simple to use, just place the cutting teeth on the ground and turn the handle clockwise. The teeth bite into the ground ripping up the soil and hold it in the barrel of the tool. Once the auger drills into the ground far enough for the dirt to fill up the barrel simply lift the auger from the hole. The weight of the soil in the barrel holds the soil in place.

Release the soil by simply jerking/shaking the auger so the soil falls free. Repeat this process until the desired depth is dug. In light sandy soil you may need to use some water to help the soil bind so that it can be removed from the hole, also pressing down on the soil in the barrel will help it hold in the barrel while it is removed from the hole. I often us the toe of my boot for this purpose.

Here are some detailed photo of the auger

And here is a similar hand auger. I've used these but they don't work nearly as well.