

Individualize pool area with fencing of your choice

By Tara Marion

A fence surrounds your pool with safety and style protecting you as a homeowner while enhancing the beauty of your backyard retreat.

“There’s a lot of fence available that still gives you security with an open type of feel to it, and we usually try to help people find something that they are comfortable with,” said Jill Schuett, owner of AJ’s Budget fencing in Paw Paw.

Although style is desirable, safety is the most important factor to consider when choosing a fence for your pool. Building codes are designed to keep the pool area safe and keep small children out, said Mark Holloway, owner of Tri-County Fence & Supply Inc., 7421 S. Westnedge.

Building codes vary among cities, counties and townships. A federal standard mandates the height, which must be 4 feet, but local building inspectors have their own additional regulations. Most municipalities require the fence to have a self-closing and self-latching gate.

According to Holloway, homeowners are responsible for determining what their local building inspector requires for pool fencing. “Most of the requirements aren’t that stringent, but we do have a few that are,” he said. “A lot of the townships are very strict, especially if the house has a door opening into the pool area.”

Many backyards are fenced on three sides, but it can be a good idea to add an additional stretch between the pool and the house to “make the pool area a separate area,” said Schuett.

A four-sided fence keeps the pool area safe from unsuspecting guests who could wander into the backyard and fall into the pool. This decision is up to the homeowner, however. “We do them both ways, but we leave it up to the homeowner as to how they want to control access to the pool area itself,” Holloway said.

Price, maintenance and aesthetics are subsequent considerations. “Price is going to be No. 1 because it is always a factor, no matter what,” Holloway said.

Since there is some work involved in maintaining a pool, choosing a low-maintenance fence may be a wise decision. Vinyl fencing, for example, is basically maintenance free, but it also one of the most expensive fences.

Wood fencing, on the other hand, is often considered high maintenance by those who don’t like the gray color it takes on when it bleaches out. To prevent this discoloration, homeowners must paint or stain the wood. For homeowners who don’t want high-maintenance fences, Holloway suggested vinyl and metal fencing.

Style, color and height are other aesthetic factors. The style of your fencing can complement the design of your home and pool, so Schuett suggested planning your pool area in this order: pool, fence, landscaping. After having chosen your pool, select a fence that will tie into both your pool and house.

“If you’re going to do a lot of wood decking and stuff like that, go with a wood fence,” Schuett said.

Finally, landscape around the fence—rather than fence around the landscape. “Quite often, we’ll go to these elaborate, gorgeous, landscaped, tropical garden types of settings with no provisions for fence, so you’re trying to put fencing through bushes, mounds and stone walls.

Equipment is routinely brought in and taken out of the yard during pool construction, which is another reason why fencing and landscaping should be the final steps.

Although installation of the fence is not required before construction of the pool, building inspectors and insurance companies do monitor its progress, so it is important to begin construction as soon as the concrete is poured by the pool company.

“Not only are the townships and cities requiring it, but a lot of times your homeowner’s insurance is requiring it be fenced for liability reasons,” Holloway said.

Another reason to consider fencing early in the pool construction process is timing: It may take a week just to get someone out to look at the area, according to Holloway. “Then,” he said, “it may take from zero to three weeks to get the materials ordered and installed,” depending on whether it is a specialty item.