

FENCING FOR HORSE OWNERS

This leaflet, part of the Chilterns Landowners' Guide, aims to advise you on different types of fencing that are suitable both for horses and ponies, and the landscape in which they are kept. The Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is nationally important for the exceptional quality of its landscape and its distinctive character and beauty. Horses and ponies can have an effect on the landscape, and it is up to their owners and keepers to ensure that this effect is a positive one! Horses and ponies must be properly fenced in to prevent them straying, but the suitability of the fencing depends on many factors namely cost, numbers & sizes kept in a given area and whether or not the fencing is permanent or temporary. Boundary fences tend to be permanent with temporary fencing used to subdivide fields. Any fencing carried out should try to benefit the local landscape and environment rather than detract from it.

Legislation

Planning permission will be required for fencing in some instances.

- Fencing over 1 metre in height adjacent to a highway generally requires permission.
- Elsewhere, fencing over 2 metres in height will require planning permission.
- Additional planning controls, known as 'Article 4 Directions', may require permission to be obtained for all fencing, irrespective of height. Check with your local planning authority before any fencing work is undertaken.

Specification

The British Standards Institute sets the standards for fencing design and construction. All the fences described in this Advice Note must comply with British Standard 1722 if they are to be recommended.

- A general height can be taken from a standard fence post of 1.8m which allows for 1.3m of post to be above the ground, 50cm driven or concreted into the ground, and the top rail or top wire to be at a height of 1.2m.
- Trees must never be used instead of fence posts. It harms the tree and as it grows upwards, so would your fence.
- Barbed wire should be avoided because of the injuries that can be caused, particularly to horses' legs if they become entangled. Where it is unavoidable ensure it is kept taut and consider using electric tape to keep horses away from it.

Fencing types

Historically fencing styles have evolved to take advantage of local materials. In the Chilterns the traditional field boundary was a hedge which would have been laid where it was required to contain livestock. Often the hedge would have been planted on a bank made from the material dug out of an adjacent ditch. Hedge plants would be those that were best suited to growing in the local conditions.

(See Hedge Planting and Hedge Management advice notes).

Timber Post & Rail

- Strong, long lasting and safe but only if well maintained.
- Expensive, with roughly half the cost of a fence being the labour involved.
- The posts should be hard wood, such as oak or chestnut, but the rails can be treated softwood. Using timber from a local source can help to

support local woodlands. *(Contact Chilterns Woodlands Project 01844 55503 for more details).*

- Minimum requirement is two rails but three are far better, with the top rail protected from chewing by running a stand of electric wire/tape along it or inside it. Insulators can be screwed to the posts and either a mains or battery supplied power unit generating the necessary power.

Ideal fencing; well maintained post and rail in front of a mature hedge. An electrified top wire protects the fence and the hedge behind.



Hedges

- A thick, mature, native hedge measuring 1.2 - 1.5m (4-5ft) offers an excellent boundary and also a natural windbreak.
- If there are gaps in places additional fencing such as

post and rail/post and wire should be used.

- This is the most natural of all the fence types here and is important for the local landscape and wildlife.

- Trimming/flailing will be required every 2-3 years to prevent the hedge becoming a line of trees.

Metal Park Fencing

- Most often seen around historic formal landscape parks.
- Very expensive but due to the importance of the parkland setting, grant aid may be available to replace or repair sections of broken fencing. Local authorities or English Heritage can generally advise on the likelihood of this.

Plain Wire

- Has the least visual impact on the surrounding landscape as from a distance only the fence posts are visible.
- A more visible top rail, or green or brown electric tape should be used at the top of the fence. This helps horses see the fence and deters them from leaning against it, stretching the wires, and, in time, loosening the fence posts.
- Sufficient straining posts must be used to keep the wire taut, and ideally mechanisms put in place to allow for the wire to be re-tightened over time.
- Horses can paw at the wire and get their shoes/hooves caught.
- Pressure treated softwood posts, or more ideally, locally sourced native sweet chestnut fence posts should be used.
- Narrow gauge high tensile steel wire can injure horses and ponies, and should not be used where they are closely confined.

Wire netting

- As for plain wire.
- Sheep/pig netting allow sheep to be grazed with or after horses and ponies without them escaping.
- Specialist horse netting is produced with smaller mesh to overcome the problem of horses' hooves becoming stuck.



Sheep netting fencing. Electrifying the top wire would prolong the life of the fence.

Electric fencing

- Used properly, electric fencing is economical, easy to install and safe.
- A battery/mains electric-run energiser is connected to the fence made of a conductive material. An electric pulse of about one per second is produced which will give an animal (or person) a shock, but is entirely safe.
- Electric fencing tape consists of woven plastic with a number of conducting metal strands woven in. Various widths are available from 10 - 40 mm in several colours.
- Cost increases with width but wider tape is more visible and therefore safer.
- For internal **temporary** fencing only, 10mm tape on plastic stakes is suitable but **MUST** be checked regularly and kept taut to form an effective barrier. High winds can cause the tape to lift the stakes out of the ground.
- White is the most commonly available colour for tape and posts but is highly unnatural and intrusive in the landscape. Contrary to popular belief, white is **NOT** easily seen by horses.
- Only fencing designed for horses and ponies should be used and must be erected according to the manufacturers recommendations.
- Brown or green tape and posts have the least visual impact on the landscape.
- Permanent internal fences should be constructed from wooden fence posts and 40 mm tape, preferably green or brown.
- The fence must have a warning sign on it if it is near to a public right of way.
- Vegetation should be prevented from touching the electric tape as it will weaken the electric pulse.



The type of electric fencing used can have a big impact on the visual appearance of the countryside. Green tape as used above, is preferable to white.



**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT**

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