Building a Deer Fence

Ideas and Considerations

My Woodlot™

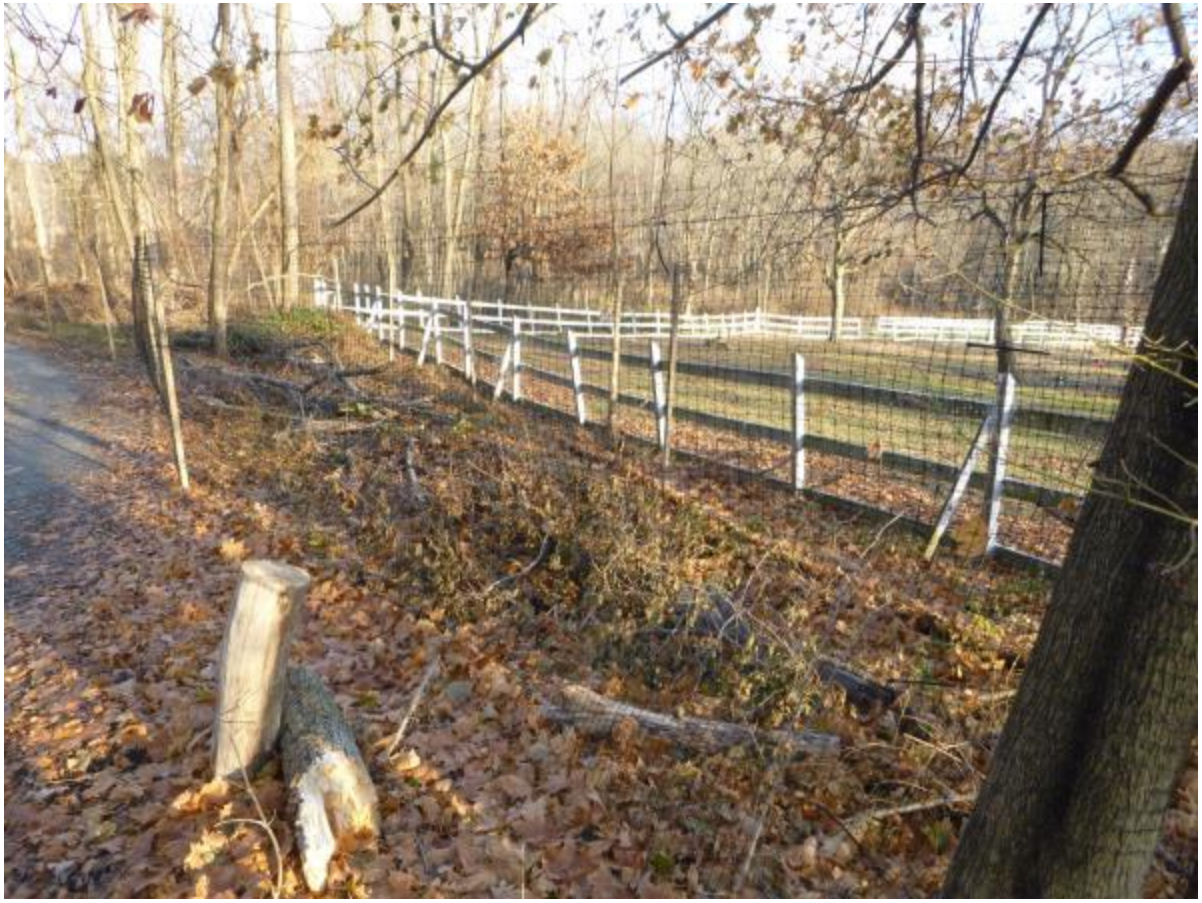
This publication is a guide. No two deer fences are alike. Many factors, including terrain, the size of the area to be fenced, and available resources, all impact the type of fence you will build. This guide is designed to show you things to consider and watch out for when building your fence.

Where are examples of good places to build a deer fence?

Underneath these dying hemlock trees.

In a field.

Around these trees that were knocked over by Hurricane Sandy.



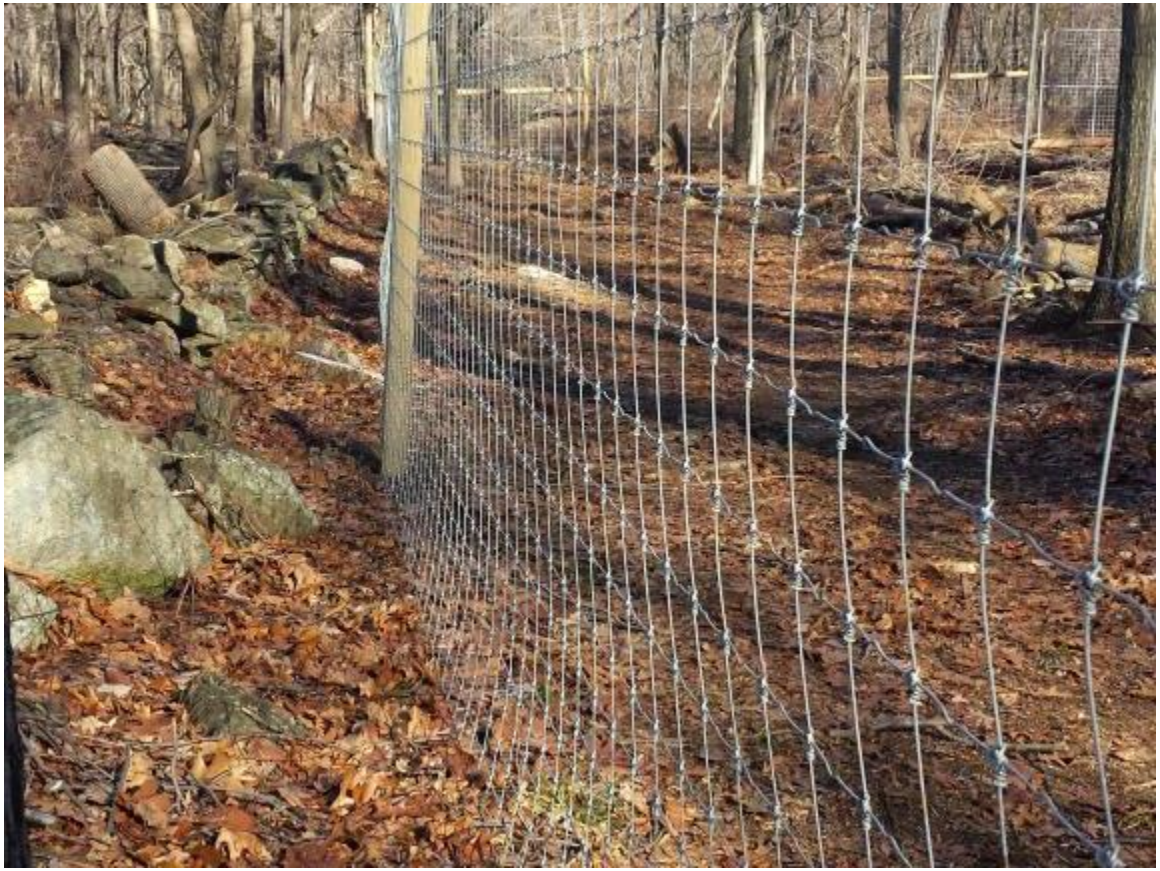
Around this small strip of land where invasive species have been removed.

Underneath this oak tree, which lost several large branches during a storm.

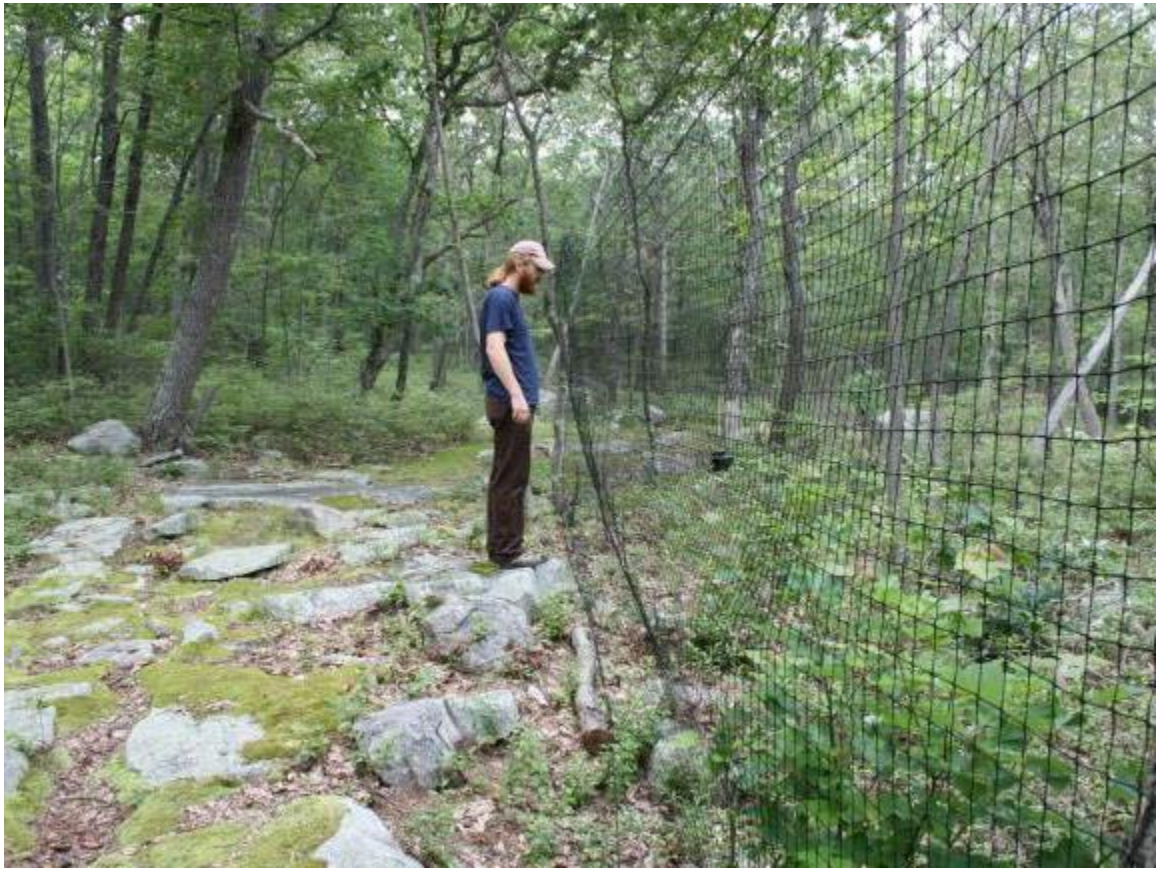
Around these trees that have been thinned for firewood.

Underneath trees that have been killed by vines.

What material should the fence be?

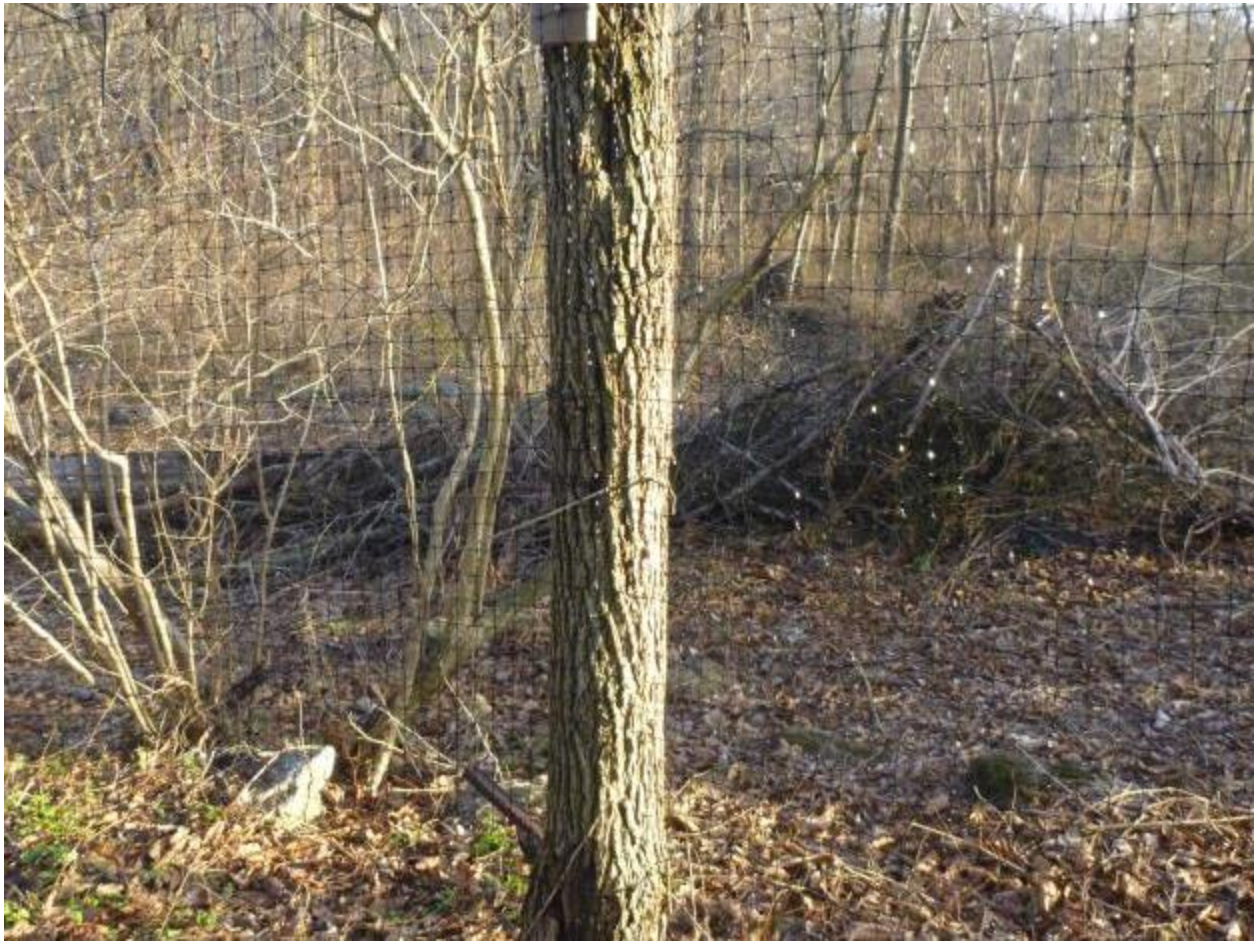


Rolls of metal fence (at least 7 feet tall) are very strong. They are more expensive (about $3 per linear foot) and may require professional installation.

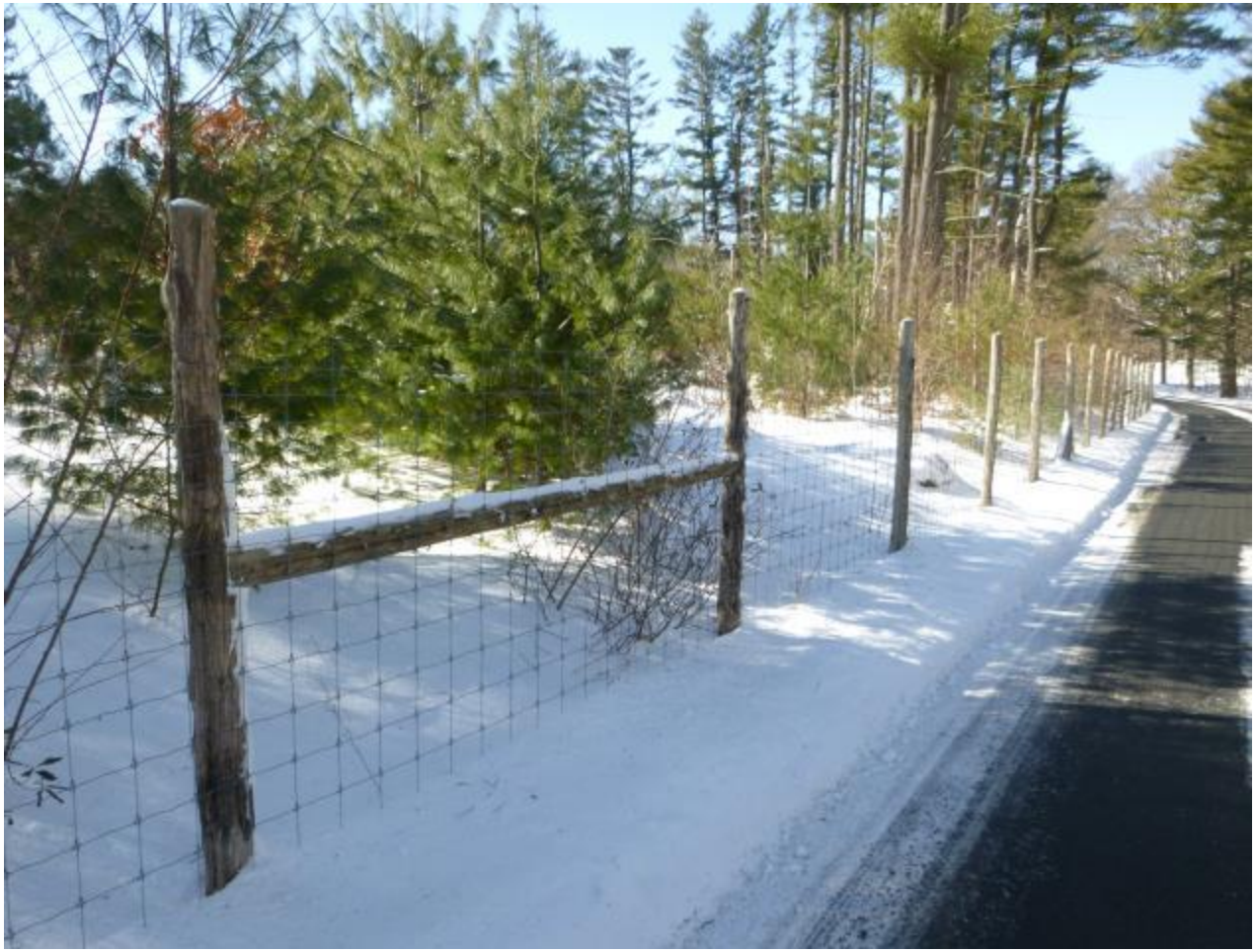


Rolls of plastic fence (at least 7 feet tall) are moderately strong. They are cheaper than metal (about $1 per linear foot) and typically do not require professional installation.

What material should I use for posts?

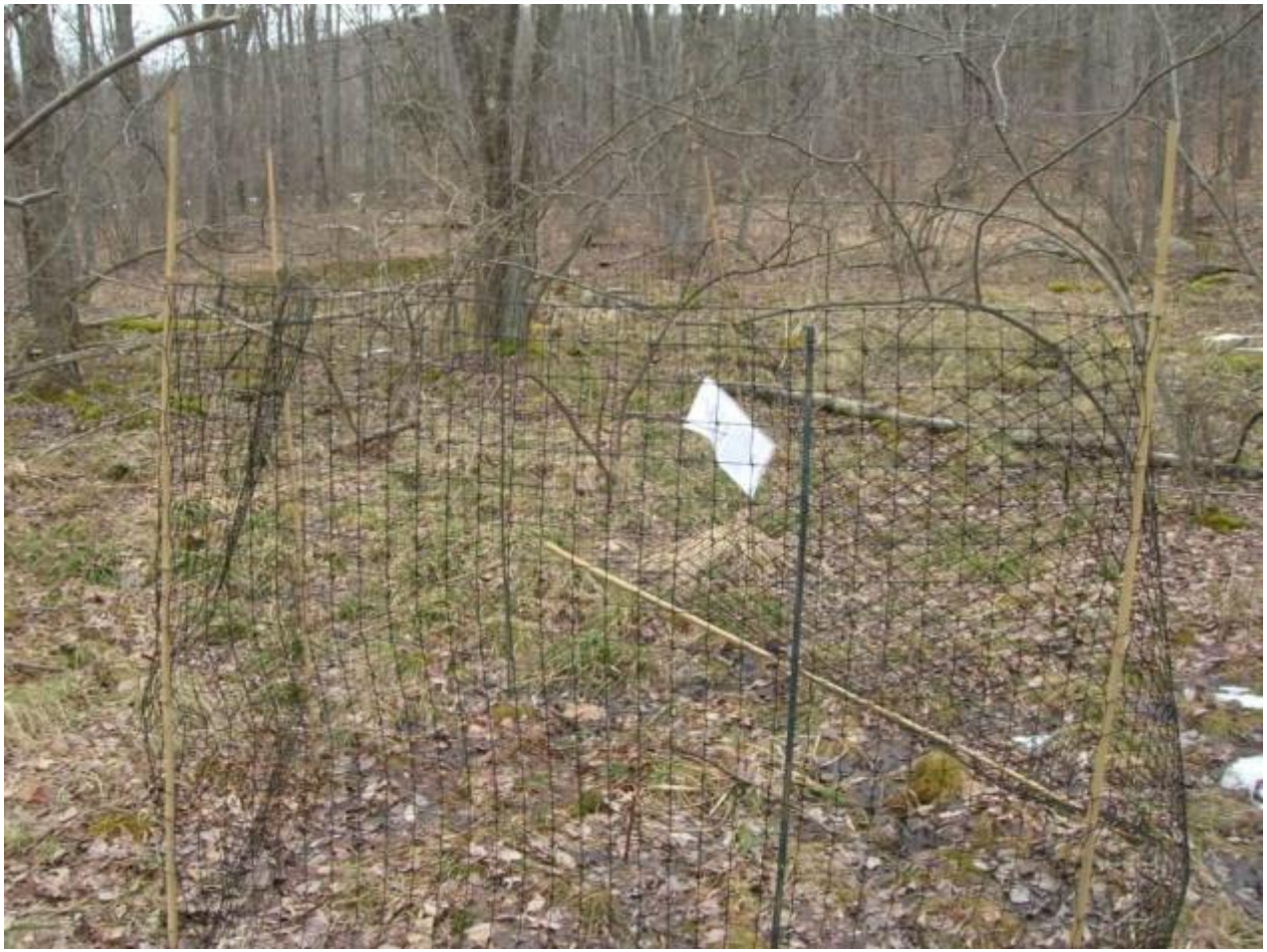


Live, healthy trees are great if they are in the right location.

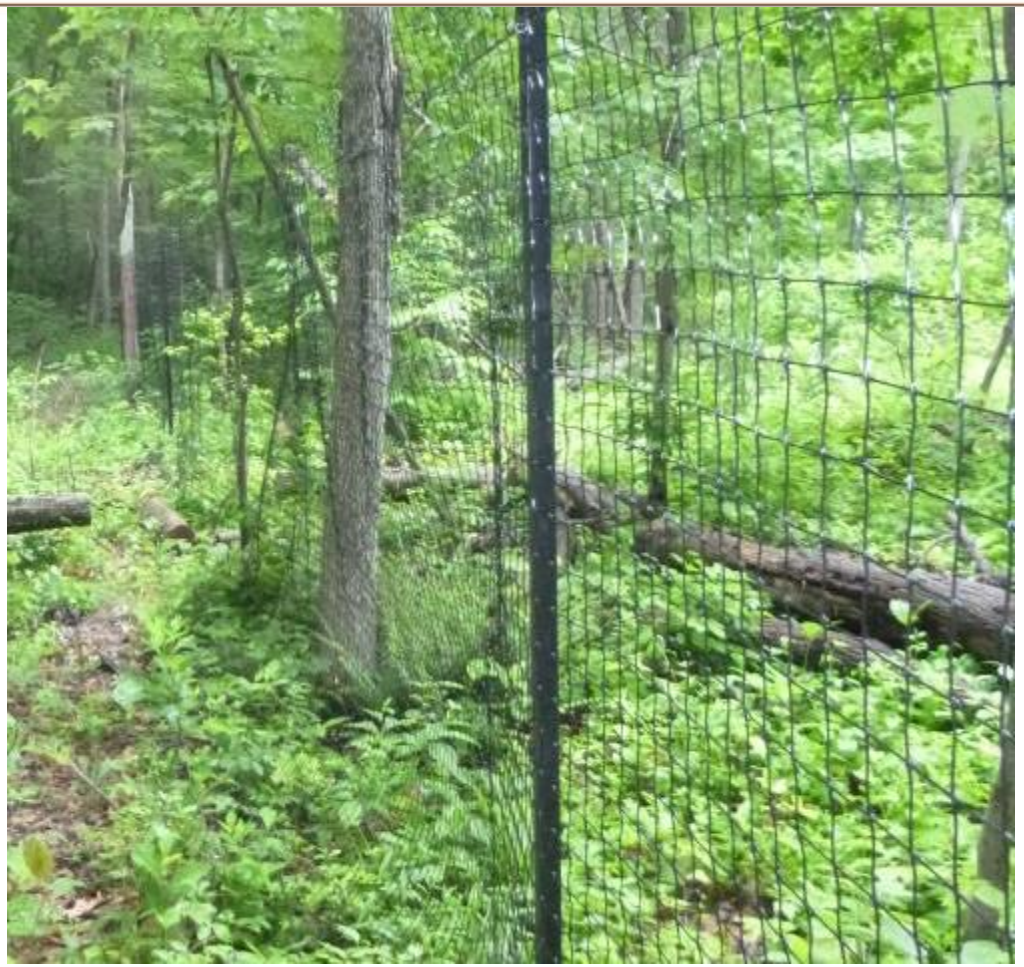


Cedar or pressure treated posts are strong but may require equipment for installation. Cross bracing adds to their strength.

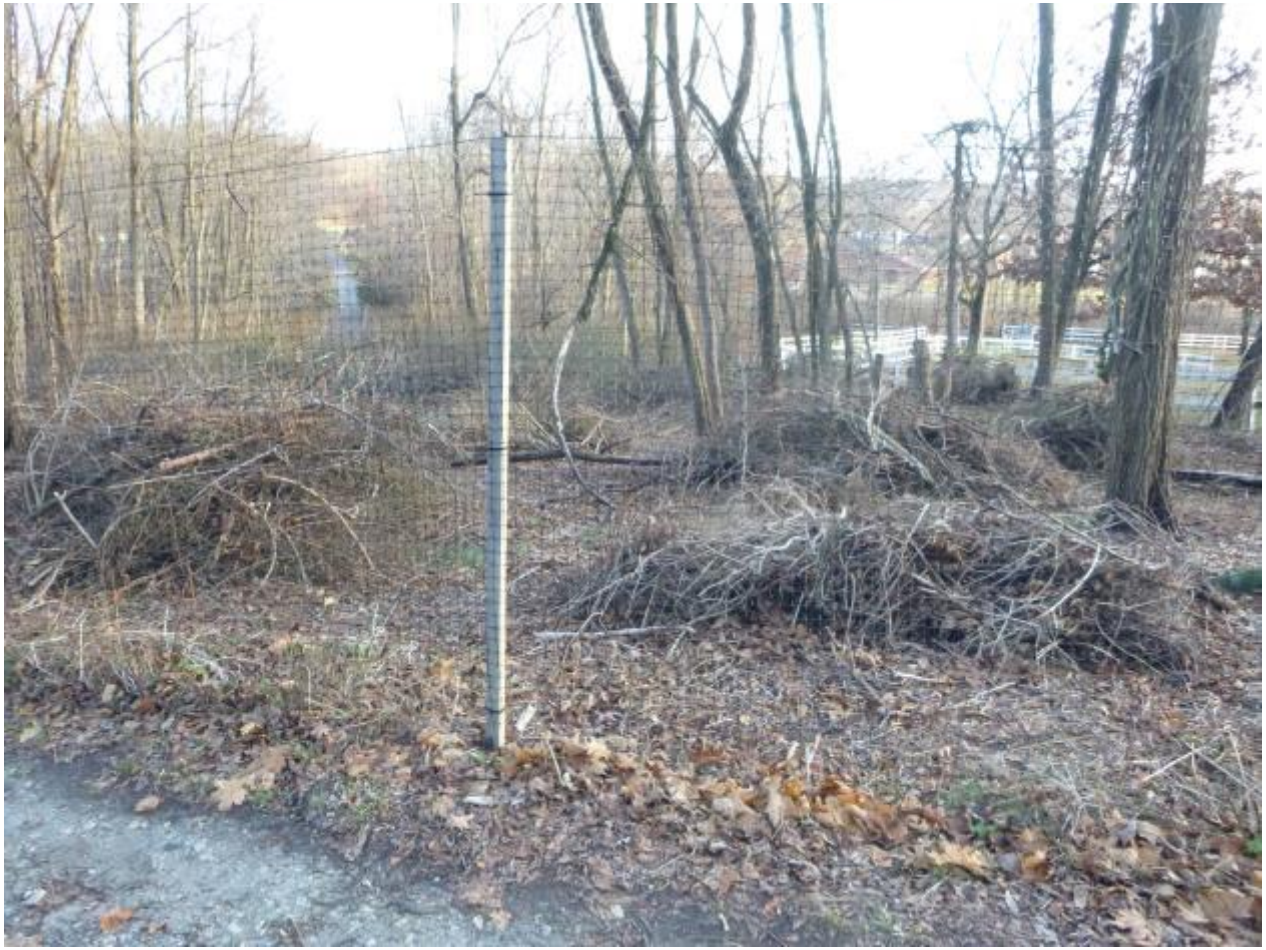
These pressure treated corner posts are reinforced with both horizontal posts and diagonally tensioned wire.



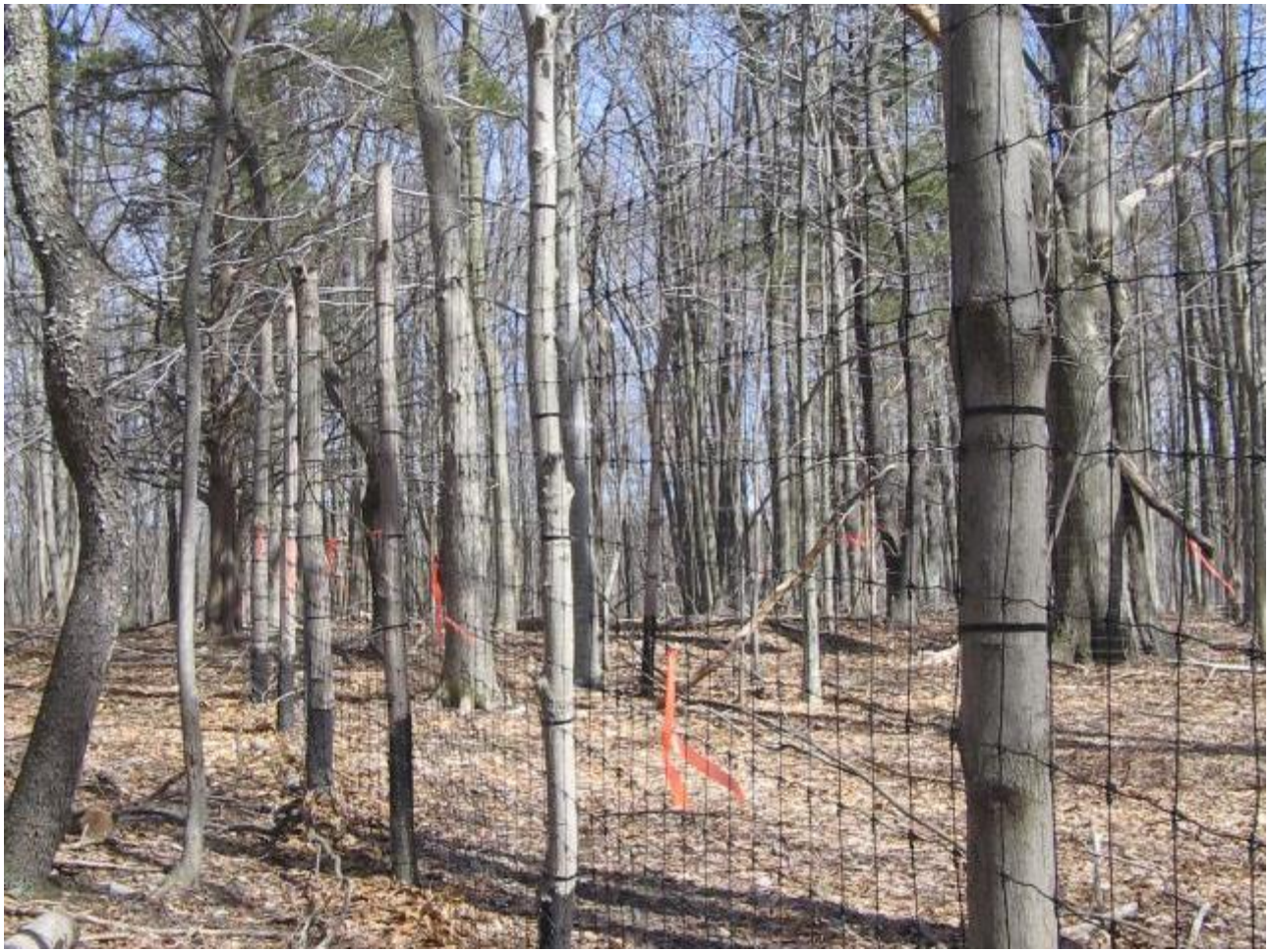
While low in cost, generic bamboo stakes are too weak to use for fence posts unless you are committed to very frequent replacement.



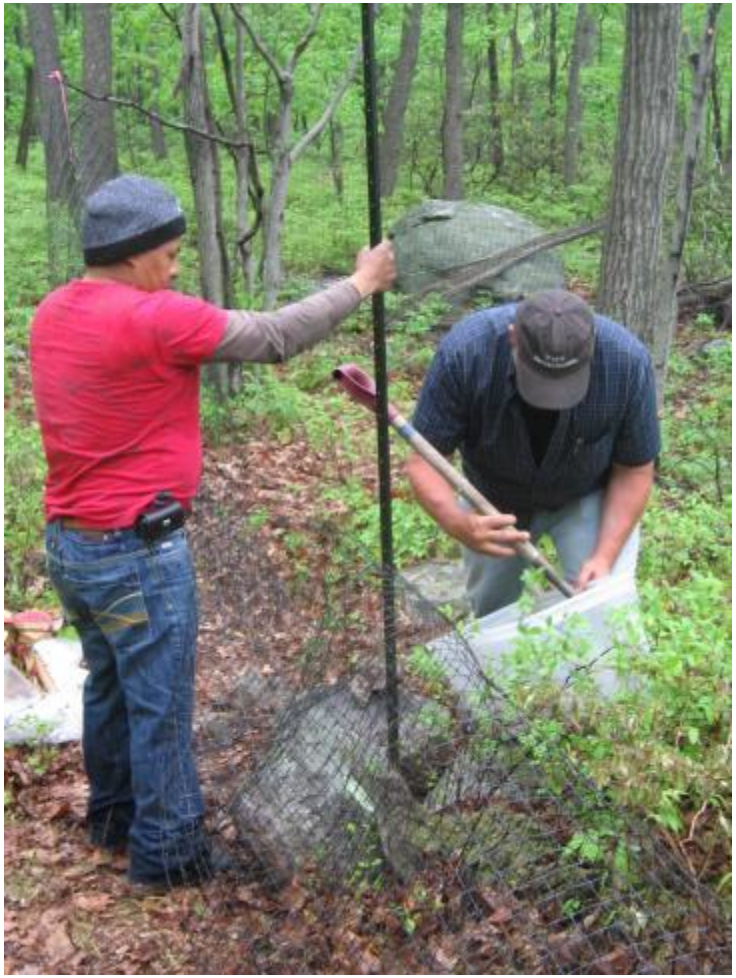
Metal posts are very strong, but can bend if hit by falling tree or branch. They are installed with a post pounder, meaning holes do not have to be dug. They cost $10-$15 each.

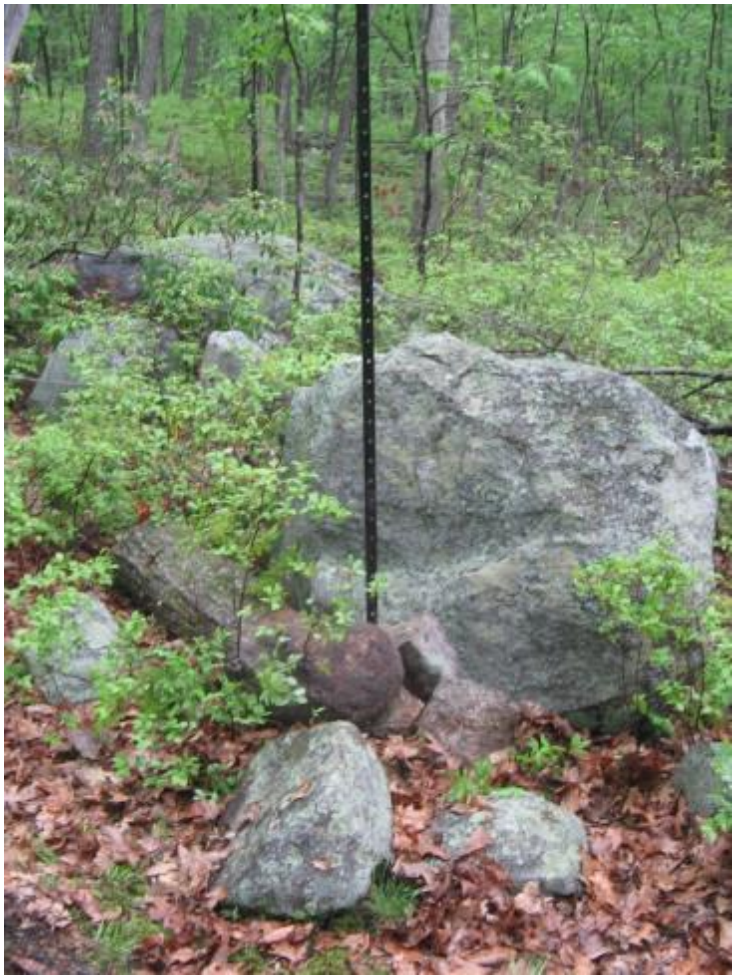


Wooden stakes made of oak or locust cost $4-$7 and can be driven into the ground with a mallet.



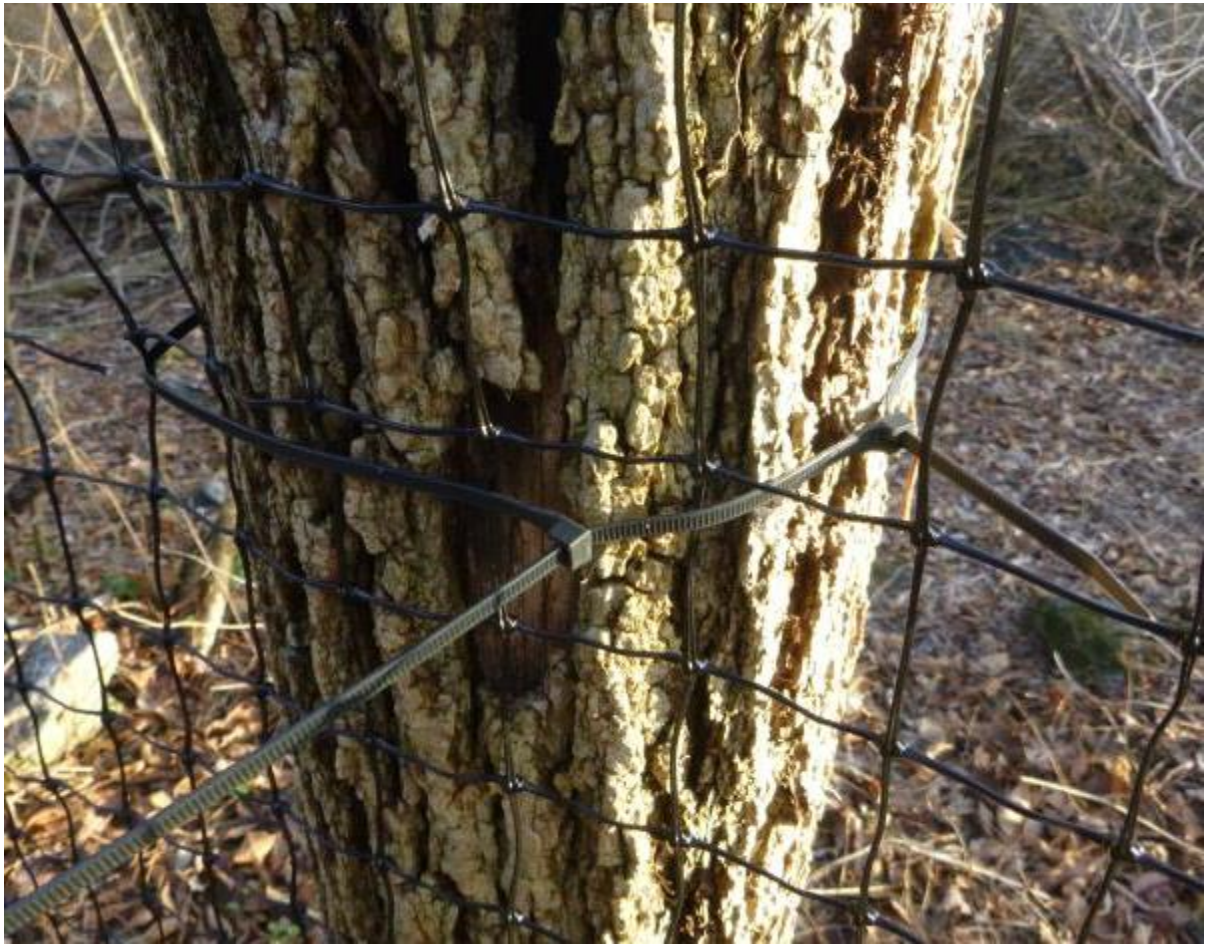
You can make you own posts using small diameter trees from your woodlot, but they should be rot resistant species like oak or locust.



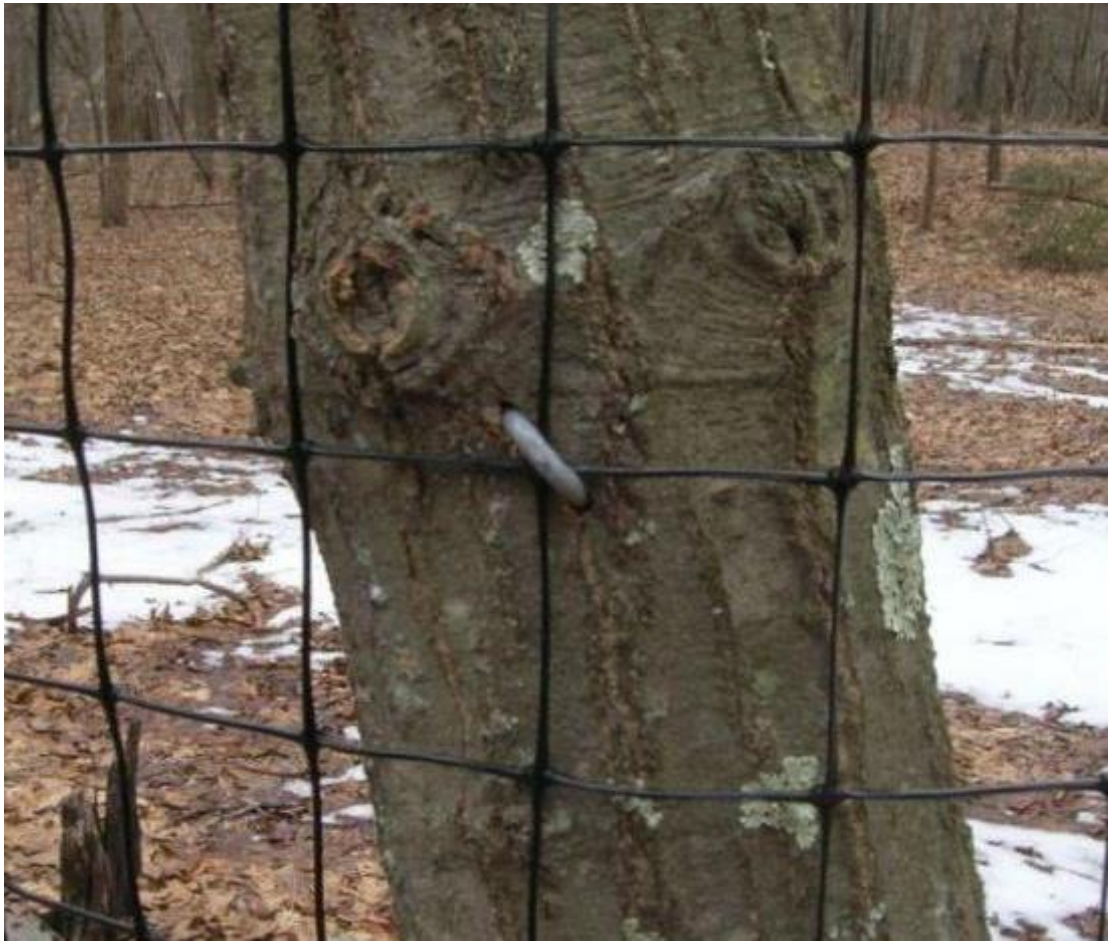


If there is bedrock and no nearby live trees, you may have to use cement and rocks to keep the post upright. Done well, this technique can look natural and unobtrusive.

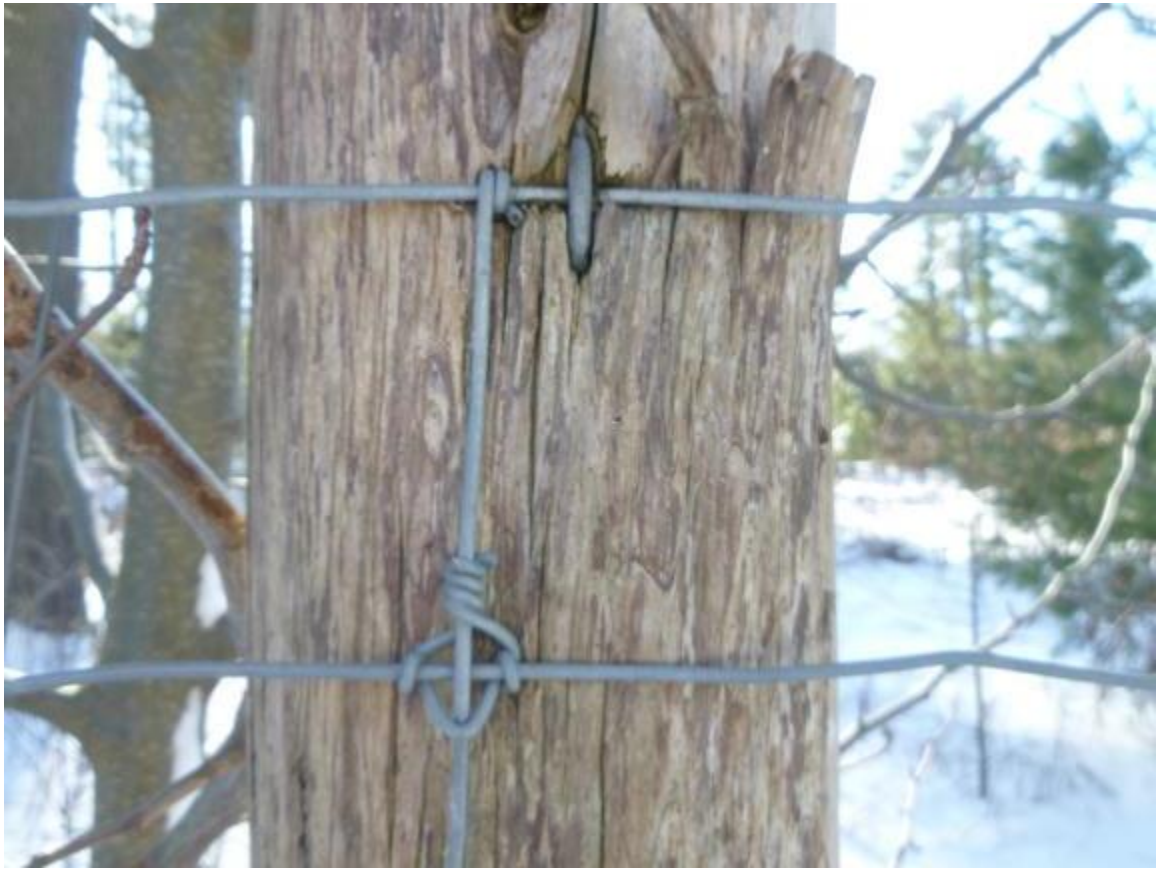
How do I attach the fence to the posts?



Strong zipties are an effective and low-cost way to attach your fence to a live tree without harming the tree.

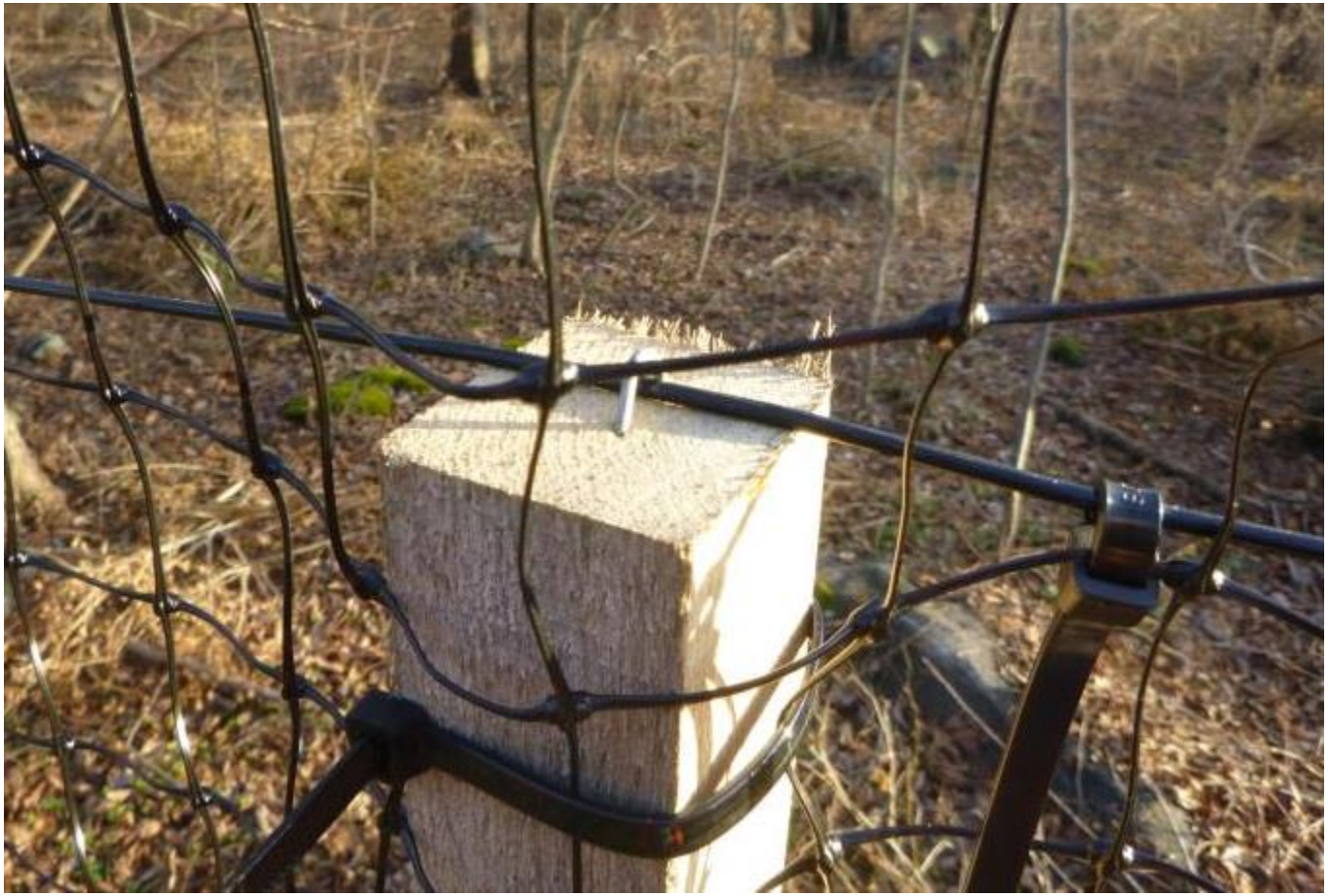


Staples or nails should <u>not</u> be used on live trees. You can use a screw if you have to, but you'll need to adjust and remove the screw as the tree grows.



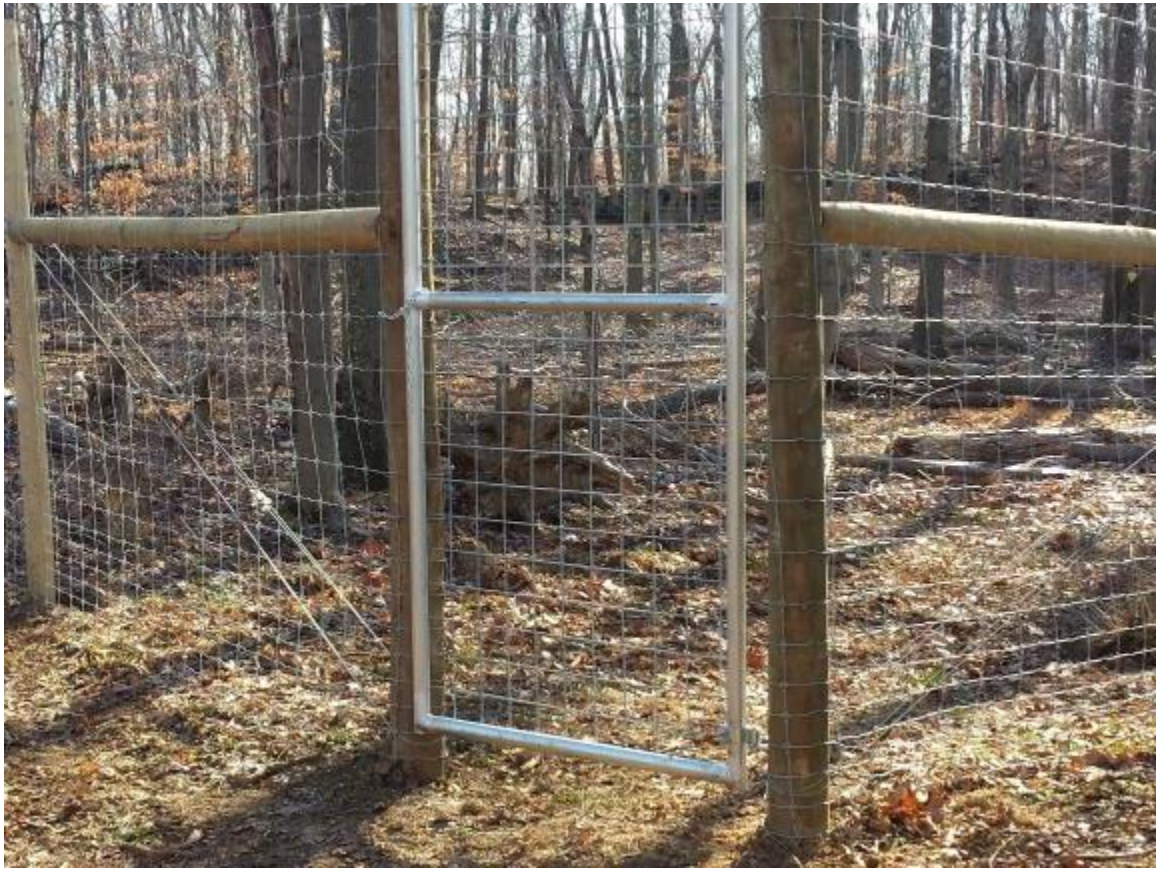
For wooden posts, use nails or large staples.

Guidewires are plastic-coated metal cables hung at the top of plastic fences. They add strength to your plastic fence, and are pulled taut with a tensioner.



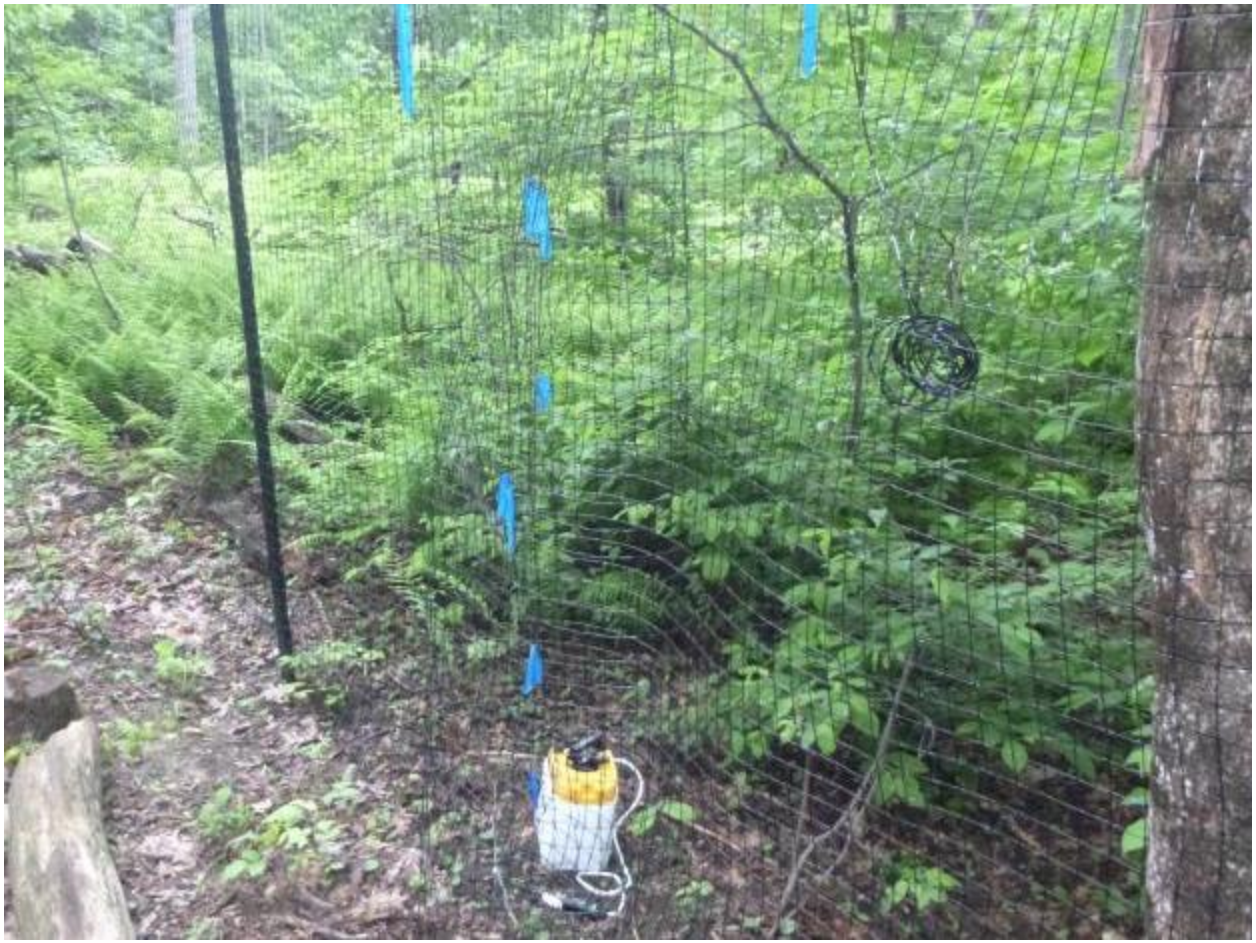
For wooden stakes, the guidewire can be attached to the top with a staple. The fence is then ziptied to the guidewire, and also to the stake. Zip ties also work great for attaching to metal posts.

What about doors or gates?



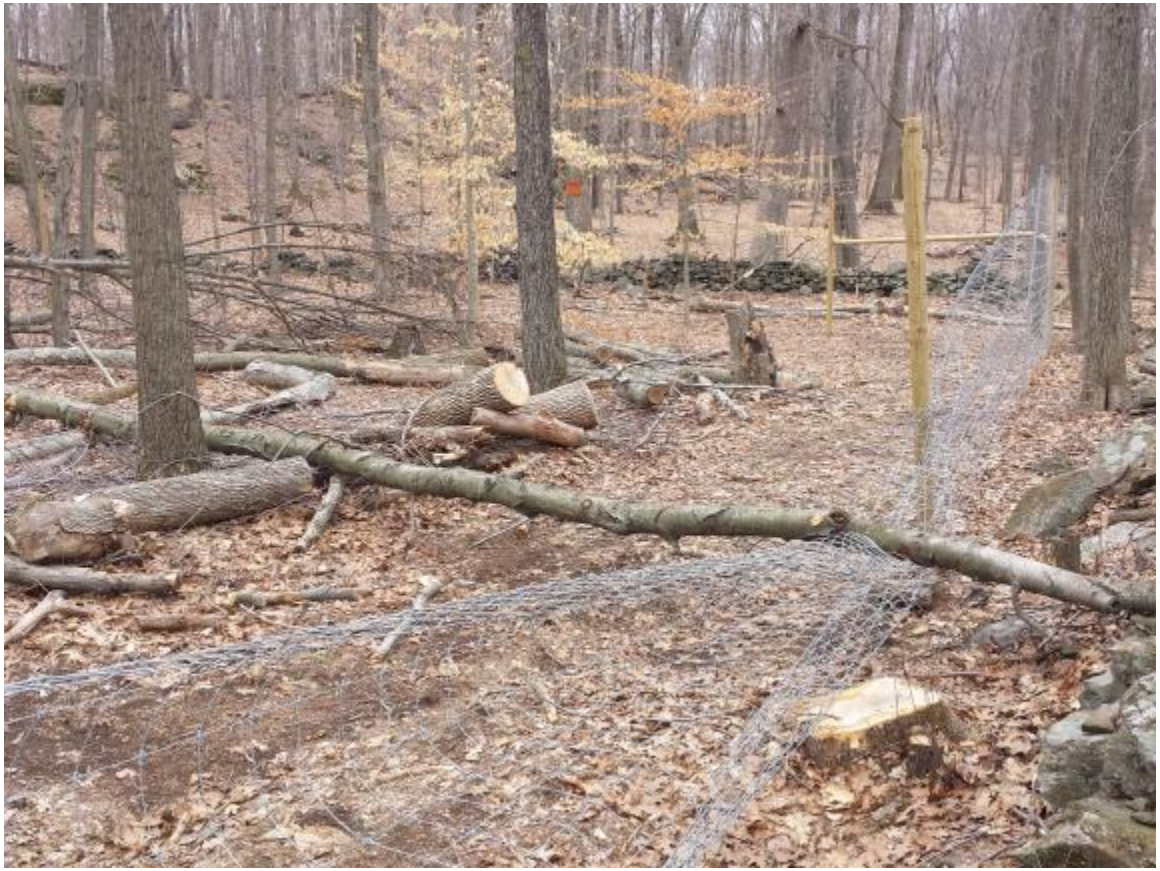
Doors can be prefabricated metal and large enough for a person to walk through.

Larger gates can be installed for equipment access.



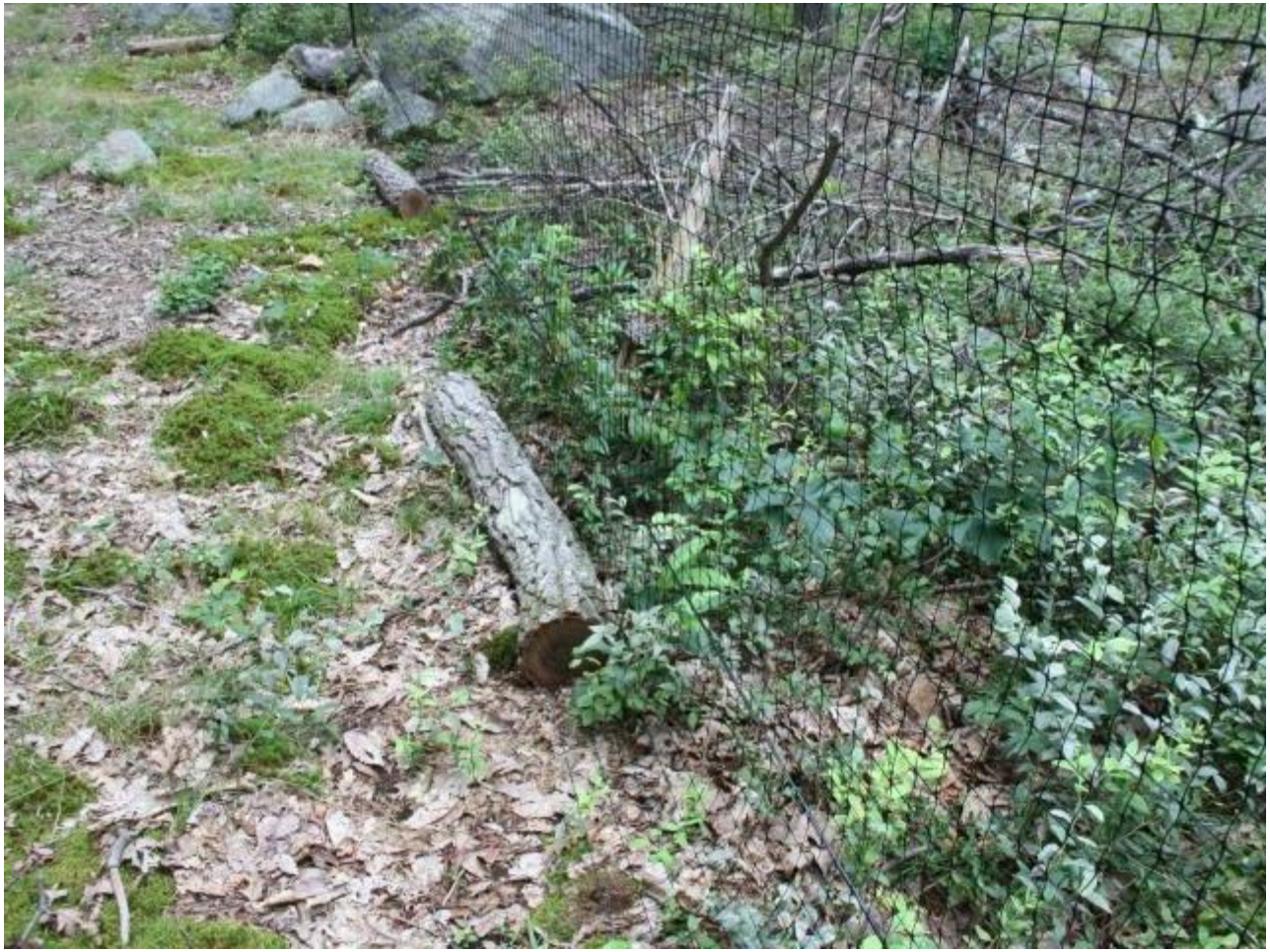
If you don’t want to install a gate, basic entrance can be created by overlapping two fence sections and then holding them together with zipties or carabiners. This fence was flagged to make it visible from a distance

What about maintenance?



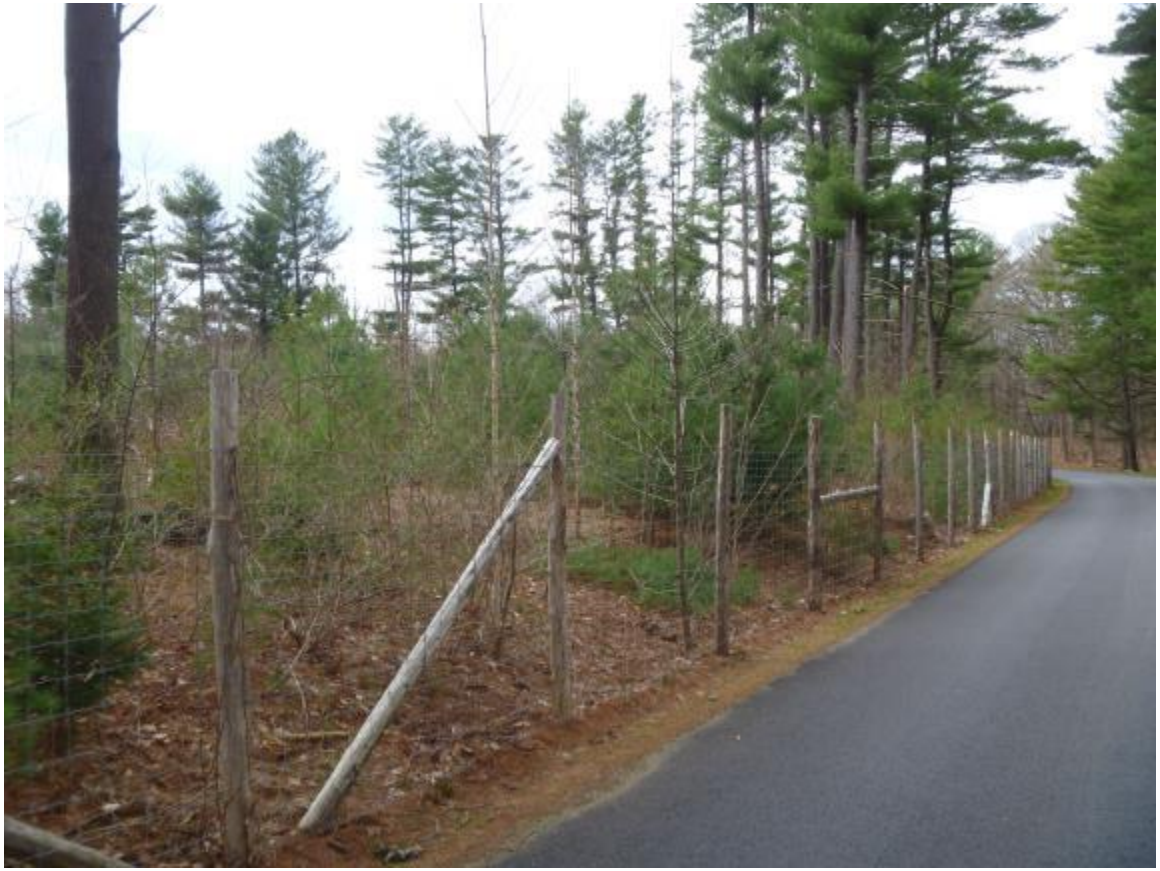
Catching problems early is the key to successful fences. Check your fence regularly for fallen branches or trees.

Controlling invasive plants inside the fence may not be enough. An infestation can spread from outside the fence. This landowner is reducing that chance by treating invasives both inside and along the outside of the fence.

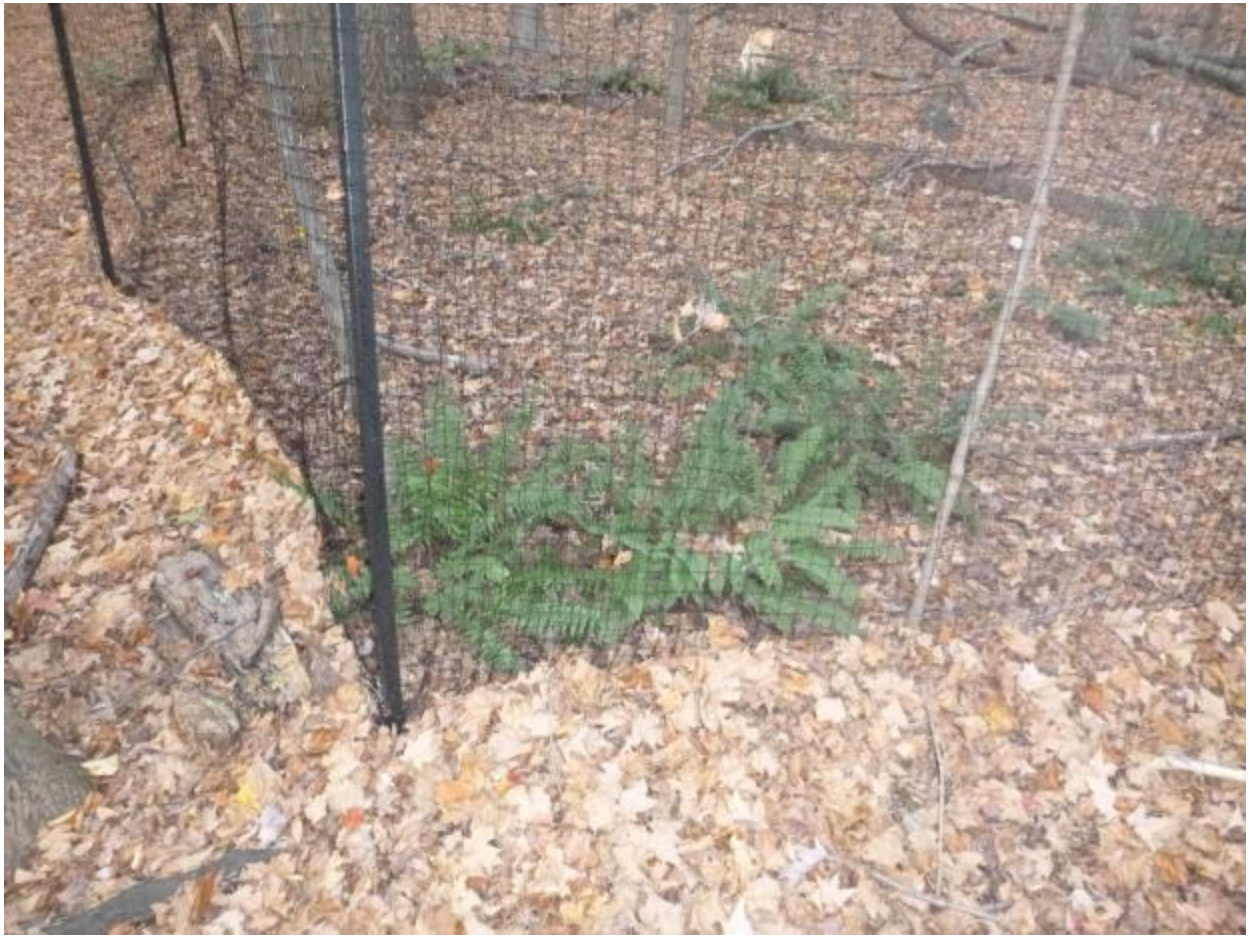


Check the fence often for signs of deer intrusion. The fence should be tight to the ground to prevent deer from crawling under it. This landowner used a guidewire and logs to keep the bottom of their fence secure.

How long do I maintain the fence?
How long should it stay up?



If your goal is to grow trees, and you have full sunlight and are controlling invasives, expect the fence to be up for at least 5 years. This fence has been up for 7 growing seasons, and most trees are at least 10 feet tall.



If there is full shade, and you are growing flowers, ferns, or shrubs, you may have to leave the fence up in perpetuity, or until deer populations have significantly decreased.

Want to help landowners make better fences?

Deer fences are complex, and there are lots of ways to do them. The pictures in this slideshow are just examples. If you have photos or stories of things that worked (or didn't work) with your fencing project, that information could be really helpful to other landowners. We invite you to share your experiences on the MyWoodlot forum and give your fellow landowners a hand.

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