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Regional Development

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### Strainer posts and fence patterns

J A. Mallett  
*Department of Agriculture*

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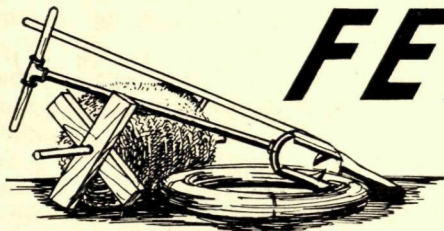
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# FARM FENCING HINTS



## I—STRAINER POSTS AND FENCE PATTERNS

By J. A. MALLETT ("Martingale")

**G**OOD fences have long been regarded as the sign-manual of the good farmer. A taut, well-constructed and well-maintained fence does more than merely add to the appearance—and cash value—of a farming property; it makes a priceless contribution towards the owner's peace of mind. He knows that his stock will "stay put" instead of disporting themselves in his own or his neighbours' crops—and the fence which keeps his own animals in will keep straying stock out, and so save both time and temper.

In these difficult days, the ingredients of a good fence are hard to come by. Posts, netting, wire, etc., are in short supply and even those who are fortunate enough to obtain these "raw materials" find it difficult to engage skilled labour for the erection of the fence.

I well recall the time when every rural district had its quota of tough old-timers who specialised in fencing contracts—putting up miles of excellent fences in real tradesmanlike fashion at a price which seems ridiculously low today. And they were real fences, built to last, for those old hands took a tremendous pride in their work.

Fencing contractors of that calibre are scarce in these days, however, and these notes are designed to assist the man who has to tackle the job with little or no practical knowledge to aid him.

### SETTING OUT THE FENCE-LINE

Preparing the fence-line is the first operation. If it is a boundary fence, there will be survey pegs to serve as a guide. The line should be thoroughly cleared, if it runs through virgin bush, for at least six feet on either side of the fence, and any trees likely to fall across the fence in future years should be felled.

If the type of country, condition of the finances, and the "good neighbour policy" permit, it is a sound idea to clear the line sufficiently to permit the ploughing of a firebreak on each side of the fence, for good fences are too costly to expose to unnecessary fire risks.

The actual line on which the fence will stand should be well defined by sight-stakes planted at convenient intervals. Cut a number of straight sticks about five feet in length. Sharpen one end and tie a sheet of white paper around the other end to aid visibility.

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Plant two stakes on known survey marks then stand well back and sight along them. An assistant holding another stake at arm's length in front of him moves backward or forward in response to hand signals until his stake is exactly in line with the other two. An arm raised above the head gives him the signal to drive in his stake and with three stakes planted it is a simple matter to continue the line.

If the fence is to carry rabbit netting which is trenched six inches, it is a good idea to plough a deep furrow at this stage to save a lot of spade work later. Re-set your sight-stakes immediately after ploughing, and check their accuracy by re-aligning them from both directions, and you will be ready to put in the strainer posts.

### SUITABLE FENCING TIMBERS

Jamwood (*Acacia acuminata*) is probably the best of all fence-post timbers. It gets its name from its characteristic odour which resembles that of raspberry jam. It is highly resistant to attacks by termites and wood-rotting fungi and is exceedingly tough and durable. Jamwood fences in many wheatbelt districts are still sound 60 years after erection.

Boree or ti-tree (*Melaleuca species*) is another popular wheatbelt timber. It is termite-resistant but tends to become very brittle with age. Some of the native pines (*Callitris species*) are also termite-resistant but are susceptible to rots and soon deteriorate.

Split whitegum or wandoo (*Eucalyptus redunca*) gives good service as posts in some localities, while split jarrah (*E. marginata*) is very widely used over a large part of the State and rivals jamwood in its durability and resistance to termites and fungi. The sapwood should be avoided however and the use of small round posts is not advisable.

Steel fencing standards, especially those of the Y or star section, are very popular. They may be purchased with

holes punched for fencing wires at desired intervals and can be driven in without preliminary post-hole sinking, thus effecting a considerable saving in time and labour. They are fire and termite proof—but the purchase cost is liable to be heavy and supplies are short. Angle-steel and flat steel standards are cheaper and have their uses as intermediate posts but are not as strong as the star or Y posts.

### STRAINER POSTS

Jamwood, jarrah and wandoo, in that order, are the best timbers for strainer posts. Reinforced concrete strainer posts are becoming popular in areas where no suitable heavy timbers are available.

As the strainers are the main posts in the fence they should be sunk well into the ground and securely braced to withstand a considerable strain. For this reason they should be as thick as can conveniently be handled so that they bear against a large area of soil surface. A good length for a strainer post is seven feet with three feet in the ground, but an extra six inches of depth can be allowed for corner-posts and gate-posts.

An ordinary spade, a long-handled post-hole shovel and a good crowbar will be needed to sink the holes.

Choose a heavy crowbar with a chisel point at one end that is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 inches wide. The extra effort needed to lift a heavy bar will be offset by the good penetration which its weight will achieve on the downward stroke. A light bar has to be lifted higher and needs muscular effort to aid its downward thrust into hard subsoil. The beginner usually raises a crop of blisters and jars his wrists by gripping the bar too tightly on the down-stroke, but the old hand holds the bar loosely and lets its weight do most of the work.

Put the strainer post hole down at least three feet and try to keep the sides perpendicular and the diameter of the hole not much greater than that of the post.



## BRACING THE POSTS

There are dozens of different methods of bracing strainer posts but if some fairly flat rocks are available I like to ram one such rock down into the bottom of the hole on the side opposite to where the strain will come. It is an advantage to cut away the post to give flattened surfaces to bear on the rocks.

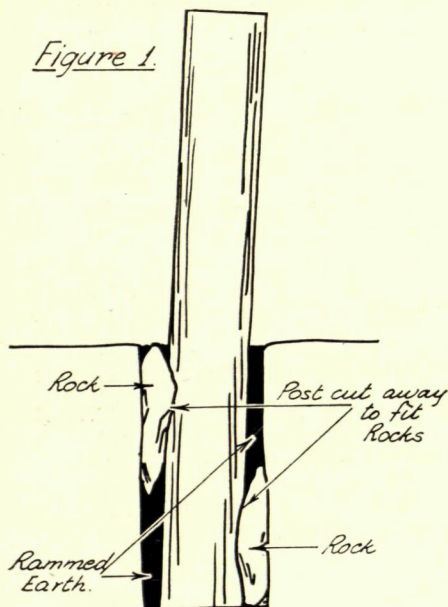


Fig. 1.—Strainer post braced with rocks. Note slight lean away from direction of strain which will be rectified as the wires are tightened.

Soil is then thoroughly rammed into the hole until it is about half-filled, then another rock is placed at ground level on the opposite side of the post (Fig. 1) before completing the filling and ramming of the hole. This results in the post assuming a slight lean away from the direction of the strain, but as the wires are strained up it will be pulled to a perpendicular position. When this occurs the soil round the posts should be rammed again.

If no rocks are available, slabs of timber, old plough-discs or large pieces of scrap metal will serve the same purpose.

**Angle Struts.**—For corner posts and gate-posts, timber struts are usually added to give extra bracing. The common angle strut is a stout piece of timber with its top end resting in a scarfe or mortise cut in the strainer post and its bottom end braced against a solid stop such as the first ordinary post of the fence or a stake or large stone firmly planted in the ground (Fig. 2).

Angle struts should be not less than 10 feet long, should be at least six inches in diameter and should be kept low down on the strainer post. Short struts, or those placed too high on the strainer, tend to pull the post out of the ground.

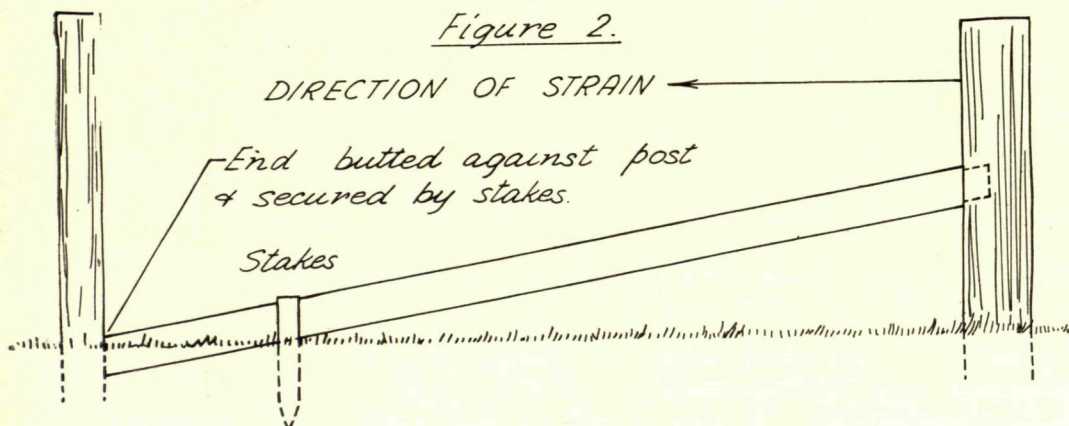


Fig. 2.—Common angle strut. The strut should be long and strong and kept low on the strainer post.

If the end of the strut is shaped to fit into the mortise it will "stay put." Failing this, scarfe the strainer deeply, trim the end of the stay to fit and secure with a spike.

**Square Struts.**—A type of strut which I prefer to the angle strut is a long, strong bar mortised into both the strainer and a fairly heavy post placed a convenient distance from it. The strut is horizontal and, being out of

contact with the ground, is less likely to decay and lose its efficiency.

The important feature of this strut is the several strands of wire looped around the strainer at ground level and around the top of the other post (Fig. 3). These are twisted and tightened by a "Spanish windlass"—a stick passed between the strands. The twisted wire tends to force the top of the strainer post away from the direction of the pull

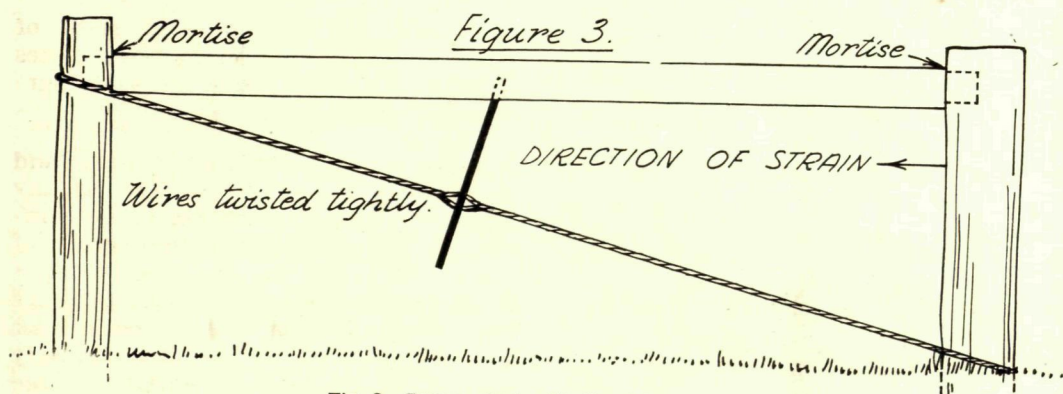


Fig. 3.—Square strut with Spanish windlass.

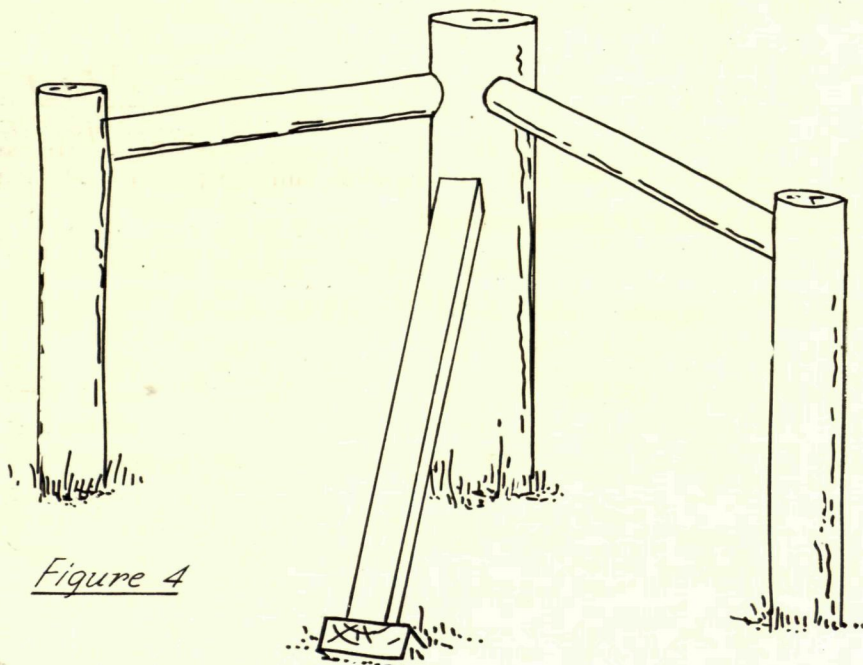
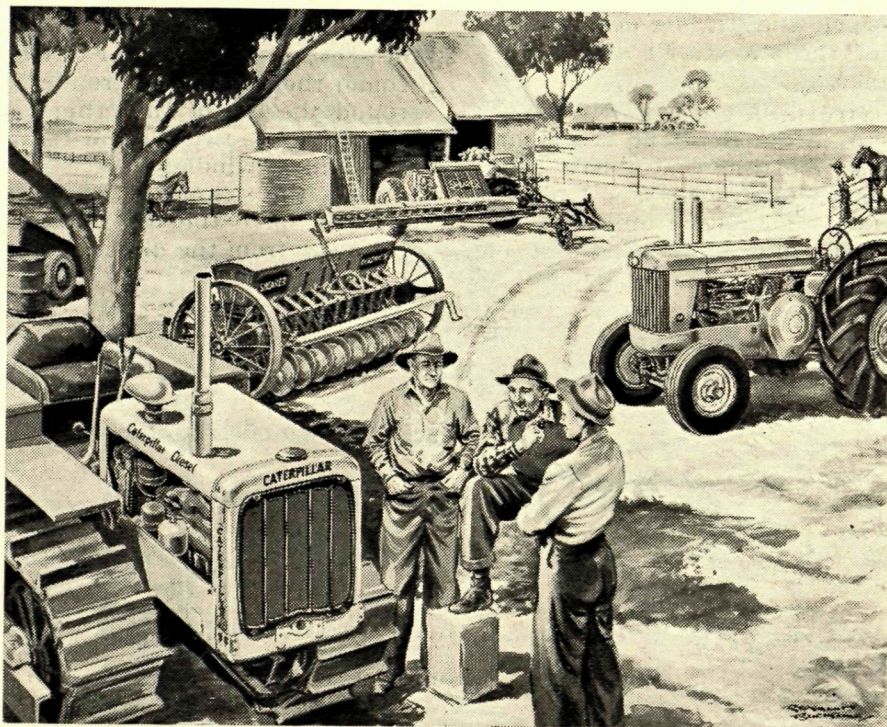


Fig. 4.—Extra strut placed in corner of paddock to give added support to the corner-post.





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exerted by the fence-wires. The posts should be notched or bored to take the windlass wires.

**Corner Posts.**—These will naturally be struttled in two directions, using either the angle or square-type struts. In addition it may be advisable to put a third strut—usually an angle strut at 45 degrees to halve the angle (Fig. 4) and prevent posts from being tilted inward.

**Intermediate Strainers.**—These should be placed at intervals of not more than ten chains along the fence. As the strain is equal on both sides of the post they do not require strutting if the ground is reasonably firm. Sometimes it may be advisable to erect an angle strut on one side to take the initial strain.

## TYPES OF FENCES

With the strainers in position we can decide on the number of posts to the chain and their height above and below ground level.

A good distance between posts is 11 feet, or six to the chain (480 to the mile) for an ordinary 6-wire or netting fence.

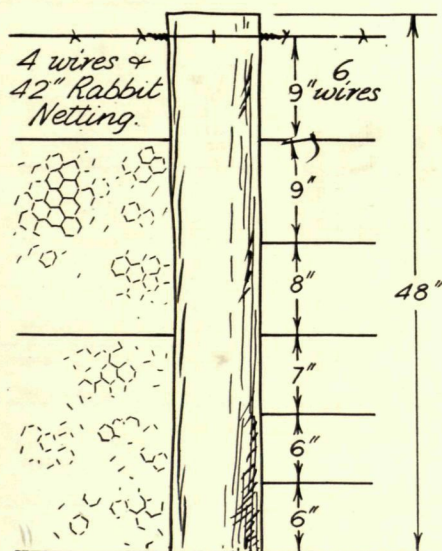


Figure 5.

Fig. 5.—Post 4 ft. above ground with spacings for rabbit netting and 6-wire fence.

Generally speaking, the closer the posts, the stronger the fence but where suitable posts are difficult to obtain the distances between posts may be increased and the wires reinforced with wooden or metal droppers at suitable distances apart between the posts.

When building fences on borrowed money it is well to remember that many financial institutions have their own specifications for fences which lay down the minimum distance between posts; length and diameter of posts; spacing of wires and other details. Check up on these before commencing your fence.

Meanwhile, here are a few popular fence patterns which may be adapted to suit your requirements.

If posts 5 ft. 9 in. in length are used and sunk 1 ft. 9 in. in the ground we have a 4 ft. fence which lends itself to the fitting of 42-in. rabbit netting trenched 6 in. as shown on the left of the diagram in Fig. 5. This will require one barbed wire about three inches from the top of the post, a plain wire 12 in. from the top, another 29 in. from the top, and one at or near ground level

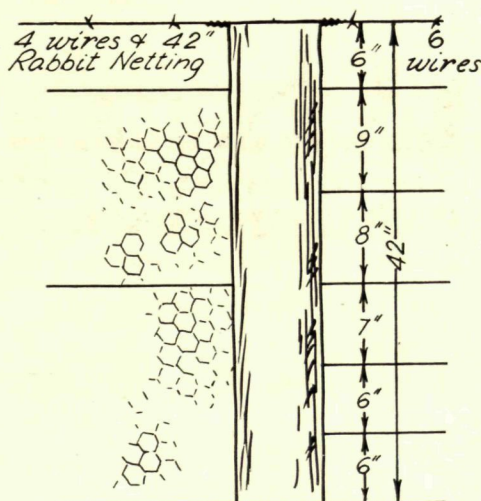


Figure 6.

Fig. 6.—Shorter post setting (3 ft. 6 in.) with netting or 6-wire fence.



48 in. from the top. Sometimes the lowest wire is omitted but it certainly makes for a stronger fence.

The same height of post may be used for six wires spaced as shown on the right of the diagram. This spacing allows for netting to be fitted, if desired, at a later date. Many people prefer a lower post setting and have 3 ft. 6 in. above the ground as shown in Fig. 6. Here, the barbed wire is run along the tops of the posts.

Where 30 in. sheep netting is used, the fence pattern shown on the left of Fig. 7 is popular. This has posts 3 ft. 3 in. above ground. This pattern also lends itself to the erection of a sturdy 6-wire fence spaced as shown on the right of Fig. 7.

Figs. 8, 9, 10 and 11 depict a series of fence patterns approved by the Land Settlement Board for use on different types of farming properties. In the main,

they are designed to serve where rabbit-netting is unavailable and is not likely to be fitted at a future date.

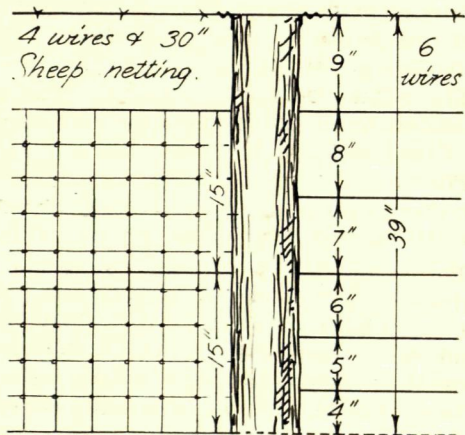


Figure 7.

Fig. 7.—Posts set 3 ft. 3 in. above ground to carry 30 in. sheep netting or 6-wire fence.

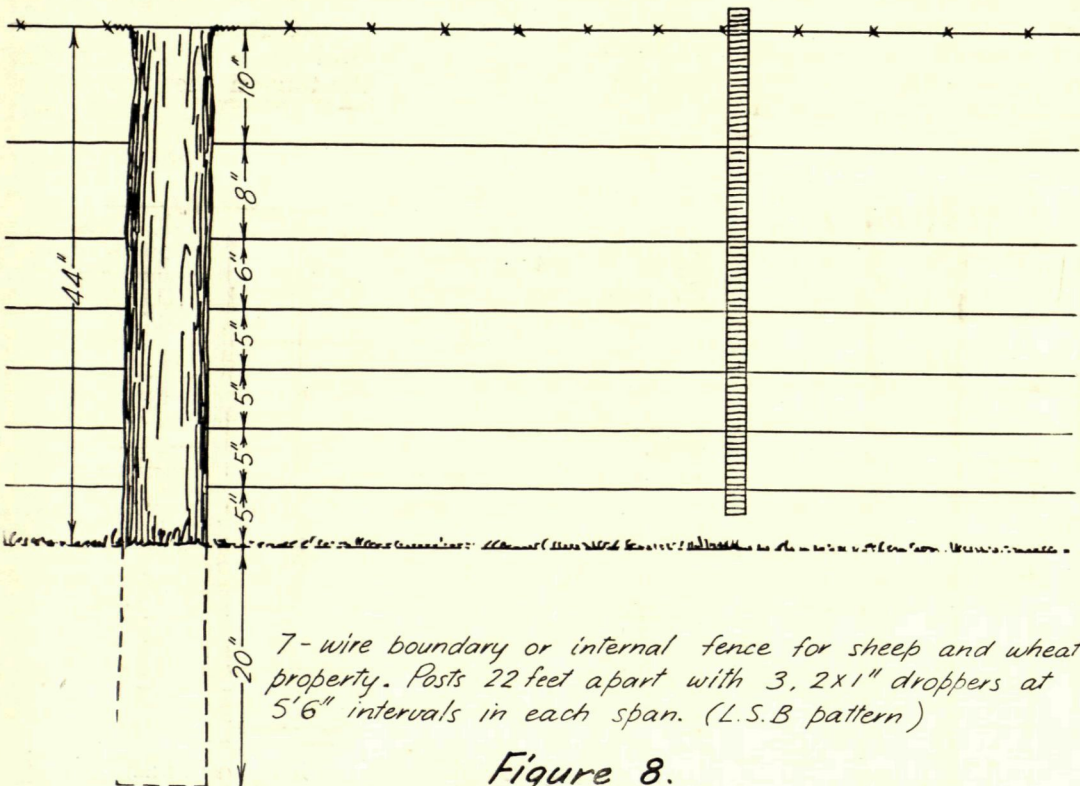


Figure 8.

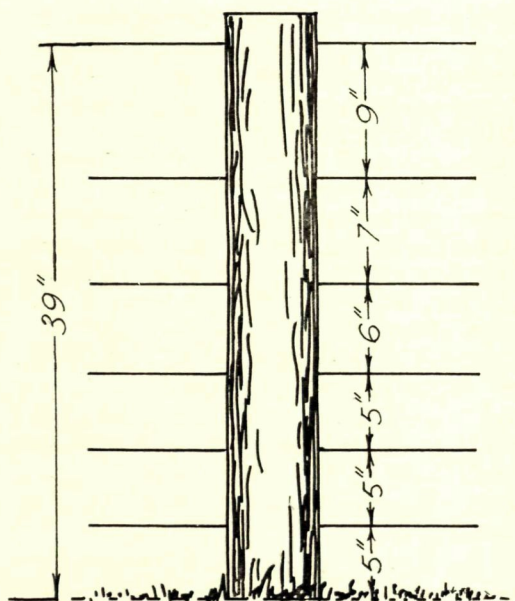
The boundary fence in Fig. 8 shows a type of fence used where supplies of posts are restricted. Posts are placed 22 ft. apart with three 2 x 1 in. droppers spaced in each span. This pattern gives a strong resilient fence and economises in posts and labour.

The netted boundary fence in Fig. 10 is suited to 30 in. sheep netting or 42 in. rabbit netting trenched 6 in.

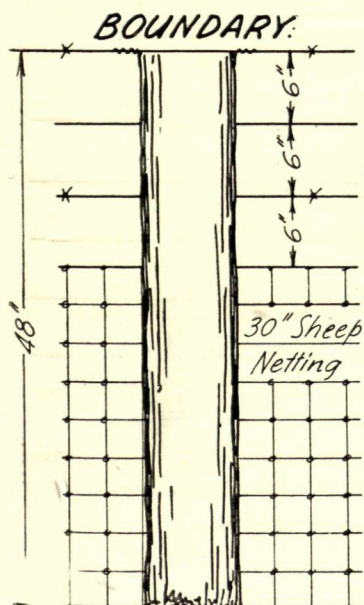
Fig. 11 is a popular five-wire fence for the dairying areas. The top wire could also be barbed if supplies are available.

There are many other fencing patterns which may be used, according to the availability of materials, type of stock to be handled and other factors. Crossbred sheep usually require much stronger fences than merinos, while cattle may be confined in fences with wider-spaced wires than are needed for sheep.

Ordinary posts should be at least 20 in. in the ground however, and it is always advisable to space the wires in such a manner that the fitting of rabbit netting at some future date can be accomplished with a minimum of re-boring.



*6 wire boundary or internal fence for Merino sheep (L.S.B. Pattern.)*  
**Figure 9.**

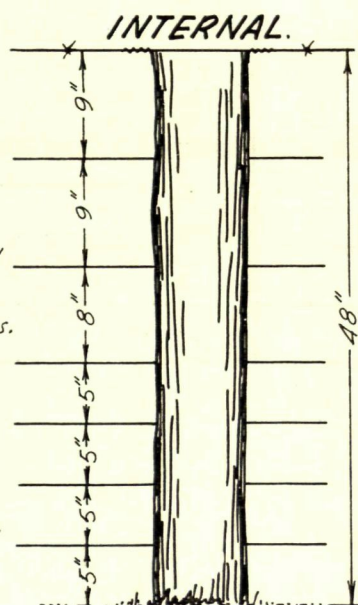


**LEFT** - 3 plain and 2 barbed wires with 30 inch sheep netting for cross-bred sheep or big stock.

**RIGHT** - 6 plain and 1 barbed wire for internal division fences.

**Posts** - 12 feet apart or 22 feet with 3 droppers in each span - L.S.B. pattern.

**Figure 10.**







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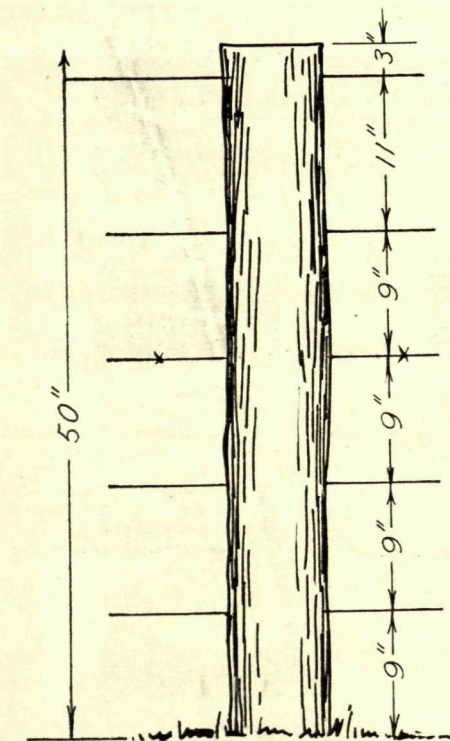
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4 plain and 1 barbed wire for Dairy farm fences. Posts 12 feet apart - L.S.B. pattern.

**Figure 11.**

### ERECTING THE POSTS

When erecting posts you will need a light measuring-rod cut to give the distance between posts, a post-hole spade, crowbar and rammer.

The post-hole auger shown in the heading block is a handy tool for sandy or friable soils without an admixture of gravel and pebbles, but is not particularly effective in hard, stony ground. Most old hands prefer a good crowbar and a post-hole spade.

Sight carefully along the sight-stakes and dig out the surface soil to commence the hole. A depth-gauge may be made from two pieces of light wood nailed in the form of a cross with the short piece 21 in.—or whatever depth is required—from the lower end. Most old hands merely cut a nick in the

handle of the spade to give them an idea of the depth.

Remove as much soil as possible with the spade, then loosen up more soil with the crowbar until the required depth is reached. Place the post in the hole and sight it carefully along the sight-stakes for both height and alignment.

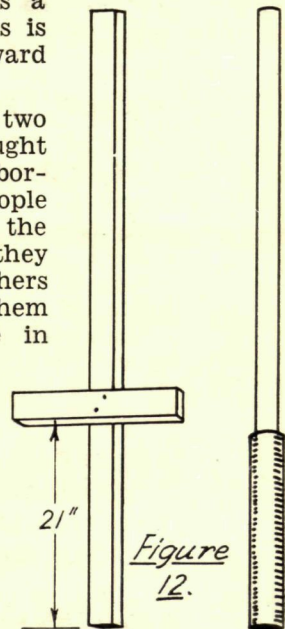
The tops of the posts should be in a straight line and should not be influenced by minor irregularities of the ground surface, otherwise the task of running the wires will be made very difficult, and the appearance of the fence will suffer.

When you are satisfied that the post is well placed, kick in some earth and ram it well, checking the position of the post periodically during the process. Earth well rammed in the bottom of the hole is what holds the post firmly.

A good rammer can be made from an old axle-box from a sulky or buggy wedged on the end of a suitable handle (Fig. 12), but any scrap material may be used. Some fencers have a round piece of metal welded to the top of the crowbar for use as a rammer but this is apt to be awkward to handle.

There are two schools of thought on fence-post boring. Some people prefer to bore the posts before they are erected, others prefer to bore them when they are in ground.

This, and other subjects will be discussed in the July - August issue.



**Figure 12.**

Fig. 12.—Depth-gauge (left) for use when digging post-holes. A rammer (right) made from an axle-box from a buggy or sulky.



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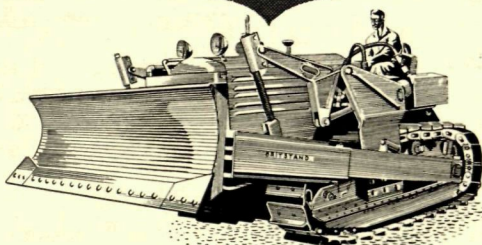
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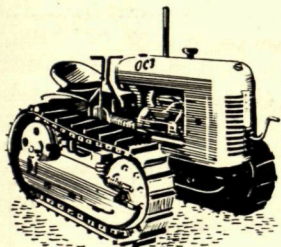
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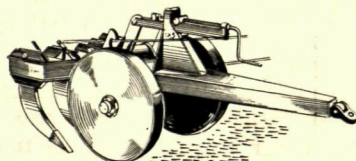
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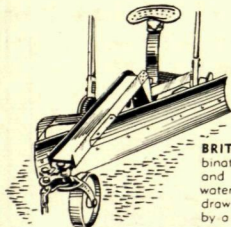
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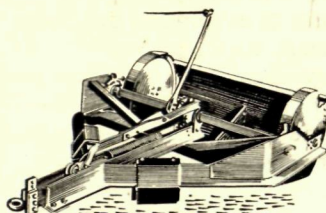


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