

Tom's Mulch Fence & Deck Reveals How Soil Moisture Moves Fence Posts

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Tom's Mulch Fence & Deck has issued guidance on how the 2026 moisture cycle across southwest Ohio is likely to appear in residential fence lines this autumn. Following a wet spring and below-average June and July rainfall, the company is advising property owners to inspect posts and gates before the first hard freeze arrives.

The U.S. Drought Monitor recorded no drought or abnormal dryness anywhere in Ohio through late June. By July 28, roughly one percent of the state had moved into moderate drought, with an additional four percent classified as abnormally dry. That transition from saturated ground to drying ground within a single season is the pattern that acts on anything embedded in soil.

Soil containing clay changes volume as its moisture content changes, expanding when wet and contracting as it dries. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service publishes shrink-swell potential and drainage class for individual parcels through its Web Soil Survey, and Greene County maintains a property portal that overlays soil data onto specific addresses. Those ratings vary between neighboring properties, which is why two comparable fences installed the same week can behave differently within a few seasons.

"A post that was plumb in April and leans in September usually is not a failed post," said Judd Powell, Owner of Tom's Mulch Fence & Deck. "The ground moved, and the post went with it. Homeowners tend to blame the material or the crew, when the answer is under their feet."

Gates typically reveal the movement first. A gate frame only has to shift slightly before a latch stops meeting its catch, which is why a gate that drags across the ground or fails to close cleanly is often the earliest visible indication that posts have moved. A gate also concentrates load at two points rather than distributing it along a run, so its hinge posts absorb more stress than the line posts around them.

Post embedment depth is the primary defense against seasonal movement. The American Wood Council's prescriptive residential deck guide and standard fence practice both call for embedment below the local frost depth, which sits at approximately 32 inches across much of the region. Posts set shallower than that remain within the upper soil profile, where moisture content and temperature fluctuate most across the year.

Material also affects the outcome, though not as decisively as depth. Wood in contact with soil takes on moisture at and below grade, which over time reduces its resistance to lateral load and eventually contributes to decay at the base. Vinyl and aluminum posts do not absorb ground moisture, though every post type still depends on adequate embedment and a properly sized footing to resist the forces that moving soil generates.

Drainage conditions compound or relieve the effect. Water that collects along a fence line and cannot move away keeps the surrounding soil at the wet end of its range for longer, extending the period during which the ground is exerting pressure. Grading, downspout discharge and the slope of a yard all determine where water sits, and the NRCS drainage class published for a parcel indicates how readily that soil moves water through the profile.

Powell said the practical step for property owners is straightforward. "Walk the fence line and push on the posts. If one moves and the rest do not, that is worth looking at before winter."

Movement is easier to address before freezing weather arrives. Once the ground freezes, excavation becomes considerably more difficult, and a post that is already loose can shift further as the surrounding soil expands. Homeowners who identify a problem in early autumn generally have a wider set of options than those who wait.

Property owners can look up soil characteristics for their own parcel through the NRCS Web Soil Survey. Tom's Mulch Fence & Deck provides fence installation and repair, gate installation, repair and maintenance, deck construction and outdoor structures for residential and commercial properties across the Miami Valley region of Ohio.

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