How-To Guide

Arbors

Arbors can be constructed in many different shapes and sizes, and are adaptable for your space and intended use. While they can be purchased pre-built, arbors that are custom built onsite ensure a perfect fit.

The following guide outlines how to build a cedar arbor 7’ tall, 6’ wide, and 2’ deep, however, the same principles described here also apply for arbors of different dimensions.
### Materials

**For the posts:**
- (4) 8’ long, Cedar 4 x 4’s (actual 3.5” x 3.5”)
- (4) 60lb. bags of fast setting concrete mix, 1 per post

**For the beams:**
- (4) 8’ long, Cedar (treated or sealed), 2 x 4’s (actual 1.5” x 5.5”)

**For the spindles:**
- (12) 4’ long, Cedar (treated or sealed) 2 x 2 balusters

### Plants

- Perennial fruiting and/or flowering vines
- Access to power
- **Optional**
  - Lattice or common lath for the sides

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**Diagram**

- 2 x 2 spindle
- 2 x 4 beam
- 4 x 4 post
- Lattice (Optional)
- Post buried 12”, set in fast setting concrete
**Implementation Steps**

1. **Gather materials**
   - Determine the desired location and dimensions of the arbor including the height, length, and width to determine the necessary materials.

2. **Layout post locations**
   - Mark the post locations with marking paint.
   - Measure 4 post locations in a rectangle at 2’ x 6’ on center. (see diagram)

3. **Dig post holes**
   - Holes should be 12” deep, 8” diameter.
   - To make for an easier time when faced with very hard, compacted ground, try loosening it first with a rock bar or pick mattock, then removing the loose soil with the shovel or post-hole digger.

4. **Set posts**
   - Set the posts using the fast setting concrete mix.
   - Use the fence post level to make sure the posts are plumb.
   - Before setting the first post, double check the on-center measurements in relation to the other two posts next to it. Always double check the on-center measurements before setting each post! (See diagram)

5. **Attach beams to posts**
   - Because the posts may be set at slightly different heights, rather than simply hanging the beams flush with the top of the posts, use a level to determine where to fasten the 8’ beams to the posts, aiming to be as high as possible to the top of the posts.
   - Sandwich the posts between two beams making sure that they are level to each other.
   - Allow 12” of overhang on both sides.

6. **Attach spindles**
   - Space the 2 x 2 spindles at 8” on center and use screws to fasten to the beams.

7. **(Optional) Attach lattice sides**
   - Common lath, or lattice, is especially helpful for training climbing vines.

8. **Sand any sharp edges, splinters, or snags**
   - Be sure to round any pointy corners.

9. **Weatherproof or paint**

10. **(Optional) Plant**
    - Plant vines at the base of posts and water thoroughly.

**Tools**

- Miter or circular saw
- Extension cord
- Fence post level
- 3’ or 4’ level
- Measuring tapes
- Spray chalk marking paint
- Sharpshooter shovels
- Post-hole digger or auger
- Rockbar(s)
- Screw gun/drill with proper screw bits
- Pencils
- Speed square
- Power sanders (orbital)
- Sand paper – heavy grit (40 - 60)
- Non-toxic, water-based wood sealant
  OR
  Non-toxic, durable outdoor paint
- Paint brushes
- Paint rollers
- Paint trays
- Tarps or drop cloth

**Photo:** National Wildlife Federation (NWF)
Considerations

- **Always call 811 before you dig, to locate buried utilities.**

- For best results when setting posts in concrete, allow posts to set 24 hours prior to constructing a wooden overhead structure to ensure posts remain vertical. Setting time will vary widely based on soil moisture and air temperature.

- If fastening posts to concrete footings, pour fast setting concrete mix into a concrete form tube which can be bought at a local hardware store. Before the concrete sets, while it’s still wet, place a galvanized post base suitable for 4 x 4 nominal lumber.

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