panels by scribing and cutting the rest of the boards. Use the assemblies to measure and cut the frame for the other side of the gate, remembering to overlap the ends in the opposite direction. Screw the parts together with 2-in. deck screws. Predrill when driving screws near board ends.

Here’s the secret to hanging gates successfully. With the gates spaced 1/2 in. apart, screw two 2x4 or 2x6 “holding” boards to the gates, overhanging the ends several inches. Then carry the assembly over to the opening and rest it on blocks at each end. Be sure to block the gates high enough to clear the ground when they swing open. Once you center the assembly in the opening, it’s simple to mount the hinges to the posts and gates (Photo 19).

Finish by installing the rest of the hardware. If you choose double gates, it’s best to “fix” one side and leave a “people” side that opens for everyday pedestrian traffic. Plan on using a foot latch to anchor the fixed gate when it’s not needed (Photo 19). Screw the foot latch to the bottom edge of the fixed side and then, with the gates closed, drop the “foot” and mark the ground. Drive a 12-in. long, 1-in. thick chunk of PVC piping into the ground with a maul. The pipe will fill up with soil, so it’s best to pull it out every few inches of driving and remove the dirt before driving it farther. Our latch operates similarly to a front door lockset. It can be locked from the inside or left unlocked.

**Prestain the wood for durability and a clean look**

Make no mistake about it: Staining your fence will take nearly as long as assembling the panels! Stain the wood before cutting and assembly and you’ll not only get a cleaner look with better coverage but also save hours of staining time. You can coat all the edges super fast before the boards are installed.

One way to speed up the process is to use a roller with a 1/2-in. nap sleeve. Pour a couple of gallons of stain into a 5-gallon pail and hang a roller screen ($3) from the side of the pail to load the stain onto the roller. Lay out the boards on sawhorses and stack five or so boards side by side on edge to roll several edges at once, then flip them over and stain the other edge. Roll out both of the flat sides and roll out any runs.