

Over the Fence

The importance of introducing yourself to your neighbors By Sarah Lockwood



So how do you do it? Knocking on new doors can be intimidating. Here are a few ways to get to know your neighborhood, sans scones.

Bring your fur baby. If you're a pup parent, take Fido with you to say hello. A dog can be a great ice breaker. Plus, you can use it as an excuse, explaining that you want to introduce your canine to the neighbors to prevent unnecessary barking (fingers crossed).

Try snail mail. Feeling shy? Write a note introducing yourself and leave it at your neighbors' doorstep. Now they'll have a name to put to the smile you exchange while pulling your bins out to the curb on trash day. Include your contact information in your note so that neighbors can reach out digitally.

There's an app for that. Many neighborhoods are well established on the app Nextdoor or have a Facebook group. Sign in to connect with your community, learn about events and keep an eye out for the 537 cats that seem to be missing on your block.

Get involved. You're part of the 'hood now, so no blaming others for any lack of connection. Do you want to live on a street where folks wave? Start waving. Do you want a clean neighborhood? Plan a cleanup day.

MY DAD AND I had been working in the early summer heat for most of the day, when my next-door neighbor hustled into my yard.

"That's where you're going to put the fence?" she asked, her face scrunched.

I looked down at the concrete quickly drying around the 4-by-4 I was holding perpendicular to the ground. It was the fourth post we'd cemented along the property line that afternoon after dragging an auger around the yard all morning.

In hindsight, a survey may have been a good idea. But surveyors are expensive, and there were natural landmarks — a fence along the back border and neighbors on either side — to tell me where the fence should be. Now, Cindy was concerned about access to her daylilies. The ache building in my back and the sweat dripping down my face made it hard to empathize.

Fortunately, I had already introduced myself to Cindy. We had exchanged phone numbers, and she'd warned me about the raccoon problem in the neighborhood. I had also let her know that one of my first projects would be building a fence to keep in my dog, Merlin. She had showed me where she understood the property line to be, and we'd marked off my fence based on her recommendation.

Perhaps because of these pre-fencing discussions, we found a solution and did not have to tear out any posts. But for that tense moment, I was worried about my relationship with my neighbor.

Meeting your neighbors may not seem like a top priority when you're moving into a new home. Between tearing up carpeting, rekeying your locks and setting up utilities (see my online installment at rhomemag.com/firsthouse), the last thing on your mind is whipping up some scones to take to meet neighbors door-to-door.

But introducing yourself to your neighbors is important. Not only can a quick introduction soften potential disputes down the line, but it can be a security measure. When one resident on my block lost several packages to a front-porch thief over the holidays, his security video of the suspect quickly circulated among neighbors. I was glad to know about the risk and quickly updated my upcoming Amazon delivery preferences. We keep an eye out for each other because we know each other.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Sarah Lockwood, Richmond magazine's multimedia art director, also enjoys writing and reporting.