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SPLIT POSTS AND ROUND POSTS

Is a split fence post as durable as a round fence post? This is a question frequently asked of the Forest Products Laboratory. The fact is, either post will last about as long as the other if they are of the same species and contain the same amount of heartwood. But if the percentage of sapwood is increased by splitting, the split post will be less durable, and if the percentage of heartwood is increased, it will be more durable than a round one. Posts of spruce, hemlock, or any of the true firs are exceptions to this rule, because their heartwood and sapwood are about equally durable.

When posts are to be treated with creosote or other preservative, a round post is generally preferable to a split post, because the sapwood of most species can be treated more easily than the heartwood. The heart faces on split posts do not, as a rule, absorb preservative well. Split red oak posts can be treated because the heartwood is very porous, but the heart faces of split posts of many other species, notably white oak and sweetgum, resist the penetration of preservative, even under heavy pressures.