

Constructing the Arlington West Crosses

Before attempting this project, consider the location where it will be installed. The pointed stake design (below) works very well on sand, but if you intend to install your project on other surfaces such as grass, dirt or pavement, we have alternate designs that are best suited for these surfaces and will also work in sand. First, we'll start with the design for sand. Scroll down to see the designs for grass or pavement.

The crosses are constructed from common wooden construction stakes. The ones our local lumber company carries are 3/4 inch thick, 2-1/2 inches wide and 24 inches long. The ends are already pointed. Note: You should hand pick the material if possible because some of the stakes will have defects. Whatever material you choose, keep them consistent. The horizontal pieces are made by cutting up longer stakes. You can get four cross pieces 10-3/4 inches long out of one 48 inch long stake. Build a jig to keep the two pieces in the proper alignment while fastening them together. The length of the top part of the cross is equal to the amount the horizontal piece extends to the right and left of the vertical piece. They are painted with cheap white exterior latex water base house paint (no primer). They just have to look white. They could even be sprayed or painted before assembly which may save some time. We use paint brushes and/or mini-rollers.

They could even be sprayed which might save some time. It takes longer to paint them than to build them. We also used mini-rollers.



An important lesson about fastening the pieces together will prevent your crosses from coming apart later after being repeatedly pounded with a mallet. At the intersection use a circle of Titebond II woodworking glue - enough to give a good stick but not so much that it squeezes out all over the place. Use at least two 1-1/4 inch drywall screws, making sure that the two pieces of wood are snug. Do not use nails or staples because the repeated pounding on the stakes causes the crosses to come apart. Screws are the only reliable method of attaching the wood parts together. Furthermore, when pounding the crosses into the sand, don't use metal hammers because they tear up the tops and can cause the wood to split. Use large soft rubber mallets. And remember, they don't need to be hammered way in - only enough to make them stand up (about 5 or 6 taps).







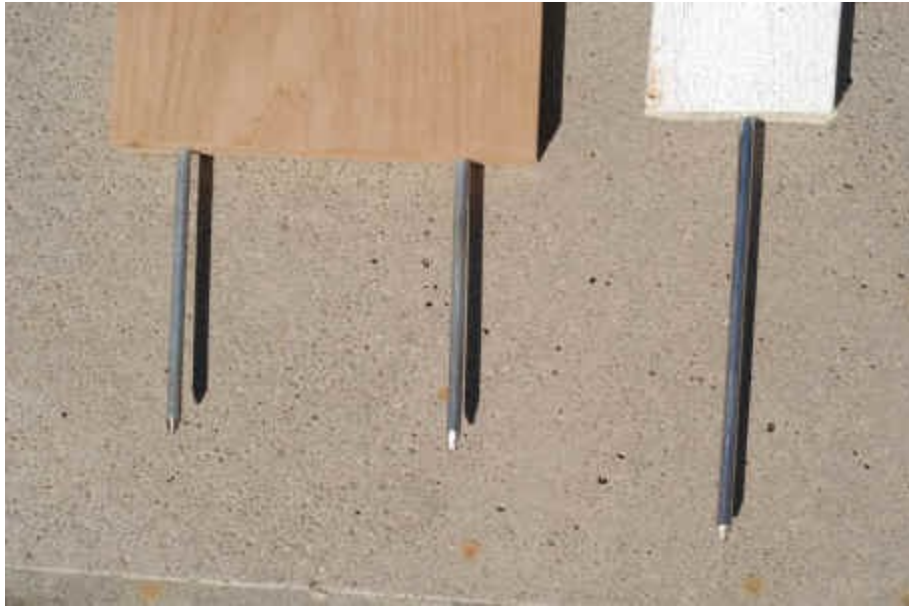
For Surfaces Other Than sand

If you do not have sand for your project, we have two designs that work very well in grass or dirt and another design for pavement.



The Washtenaw County Chapter came up with a cross design that has a > metal spike on the bottom rather than a wooden point. The vertical section of the cross is cut off square at the bottom and then using a drill press, a hole is drilled in the center of the vertical section a > tiny bit smaller than the diameter of the metal spike. We used 7 inch long gutter spikes (for installing rain gutters) which are basically very long nails. We snip off the head and then drive the blunt end into the hole. You may also obtain 3/16 inch diameter steel rod and cut it to the desired length. It's probably not essential that it be pointed. It should go into grass or soft dirt even with a blunt end.

We also have a headstone design using two spikes. For both designs, we drill the holes about 3 inches deep into the wood, which leaves about 4 inches of the spike sticking out. What I like best about the headstone shape with spikes are, (1) It's only one piece of wood so there is no assembly required, (2) It will work in a variety of surfaces (except pavement), (3) It stacks up nice and flat for storage and transportation, (4) you won't get any comments about Christian religious symbols. See description of material choices (plywood, lumber or pre-primed MDF) below.



For pavement, we have a headstone design with a flat base that will allow it to stand up on its own. Like the crosses, it consists of only two pieces of wood but it may end up costing a little more. The headstones can be made of 3/4 inch CDX grade plywood (the cheapest) ripped into eight, 5-3/4 inch wide strips. You will need access to a table saw. Cut each strip up into 24 inch long pieces. From each piece, cut off a base, 5-3/4 inches by 5-3/4 inches. The remainder will become the upright section. To create the headstone shape, you could round over the top with a jig saw or band saw or just cut the corners off at 45 degrees (faster and easier). Constructing jigs will speed up the process and insure accuracy and consistency. Again, be sure to use screws and glue for assembly. You can get 32 headstones from one 4 foot by 8 foot sheet of plywood. You could use common 1 x 6 lumber. It will cost more than plywood but requires less labor. Our local lumber company also sells 1 x 6 MDF (similar to particle board) that is pre primed (white) which would only need to be painted on the cut edge. It is also much smoother than CDX grade plywood.

