

Creating Patio Spaces



by

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design and consultation

especially for the homeowner

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Creating Patio Spaces

Introduction:

Water-wise landscapes can do many things and function on many levels but they all revolve around the reduction or elimination of turf grasses. Creating patio spaces is one response to the question: what do we do with all of that space that used to be the lawn? This workshop will focus on sand-set pavers and other materials that the average homeowner can install themselves.

Getting Started:

Form Follows Function – the number one rule. Take some time to ponder how you want to use your yard. Often people have that standard slab of concrete at the back of a sliding glass door. Folks may live in a home for years and never explore the yard beyond this vantage point. One of your first assignments is to drag a couple of chairs around the yard and find new places to sit – take a few minutes to do this, no matter how small your lot is. Explore the possibilities. You may be surprised to discover a great view, or some welcome shade. We live in a Mediterranean climate where living outdoors is possible most of the year. Creating new places to sit – even very small little corners – is one way of re-thinking our approach to the landscape. Think outdoor rooms. You can create an intimate 6 x 6 ft space that has enough room for a couple of chairs and a small table. A place to sit with a friend or your spouse with a glass of wine and unwind after a day at work. Or a spot in the morning sun to enjoy the birds while you have your coffee.



#1 – First decide how you want to use this space. Do you want an intimate area for 2 people, or a space that allows 8 people to sit and enjoy a meal? A small space such as the one to the left is about 6ft in diameter. A larger space for 8 people dining may be 10 x 10 ft. Make sure to allow 36” from the edge of a table for rising room. This means, how much additional room you need to pull chairs out when sitting down. How much space is required to walk behind the chairs comfortably? The best way to figure out how much space these activities require is to simply get the table and chairs, put them in the space, walk it through and see for yourself if it works well for the intended activity. Where is the sun at the time of day you will be using this space? Do you need shade? How about an electrical outlet for music, or plugging in a laptop, or a pump for a little fountain? Consider all of the possibilities and try to figure out where you are going *before* you get there. That is form following function.

Right: A new space is created off an existing patio where a lawn used to be. A series of concrete pavers leads to an area of low maintenance of Pea Gravel. A planting of ornamental grasses provides easy care, texture and movement in the garden. Think ‘outdoor rooms’. Think opportunity... This area could be surrounded with hummingbird and butterfly plants, or fragrant lavender and other herbs. Consider the possibilities.



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Materials:

A visit to the local stone yard or landscape material supplier can be very helpful in getting your creative juices flowing. Take a look at what is available. Ask questions about the installation of the materials. This class will focus on sand set pavers, brick and stone. Ask if something you like can be set in sand or does it need to be mortared? One helpful hint - the keep it simple. Simple is good, simple is also classic. Design your space with the specific materials already in mind. When working with pavers and brick go for shapes that are rectangular or square to avoid having to make cuts. Also when working with brick avoid a herringbone pattern for the same reason; lots of cuts.



Manufactured Pavers come in many sizes, including a special mix that creates a radius pattern like this one.



Flagstone lends itself to a more free form layout. Large pieces of flagstone (such as the path below) work best to create a stable surface that won't 'rock'.



Rectangular Concrete Pavers, really basic and simple, very effective.



This space is created with D.G. (decomposed granite).



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Manufactured Pavers: Typically this term refers to pavers that are made of concrete. From the cheap 12 x 12 grey concrete pavers familiar to garden centers, to the more high-end pavers that are colored and come in different shapes and sizes. All are great candidates for sand set patios. Ackerstone is a local manufacturer of pavers in Corona. They often have pallets of over-run materials for sale at a significant discount. They have a web site worth exploring: ackerstone.com

Concrete smooth top or trowel top pavers: These are pavers that have a finish that resembles a patio surface, typically in a natural grey concrete color, they are thick and heavy, which is a benefit as they sit well and solid. They come in a range of sizes from 12x12 to 36x36. One local source is Academy Concrete Products in Riverside.

Exposed aggregate pavers: A great choice for a 'retro' look. These pavers are seeded on top with colored pebbles, and were popular during the late 50's and early 60's. Available at most landscape supply yards such as Thompson's in Fontana.

Brick: Uniform in size and thickness, making it a good choice for sand set techniques. Using a basket weave pattern rather than a herring bone pattern can save a lot of time and trouble making cuts.

Recycled Concrete: Pieces of concrete that have been broken out of an old patio or walkway makes a great building material. It can be sand set or mortared in. Make sure you use concrete that does not have re-bar or welded wire mesh.

Flagstone: Visit the stone yard to see what is available. Because flagstones have an irregular shape they lend themselves to a more freeform layout. They tend to have an uneven surface, so larger and thicker pieces of stone are better. This will provide a more stable surface and prevent 'rocking'. A thickness of 2 inches or more is best, and the larger the surface of the stone the more stable it will be.

D.G. stands for decomposed granite: This is a relatively cheap material that is easy to install. I recommend a 'dusting method' where a 2 to 3 inch layer of base (C-mix) is first laid down and compacted, then dusting a 1 inch layer of D.G. on top, and that is compacted. Makes a great permeable surface that is easy to rake. Be aware that the D.G. is like coarse grains of sand and if you have hardwood floors this grit can come in on people's shoes and scratch the surface... something to think about.

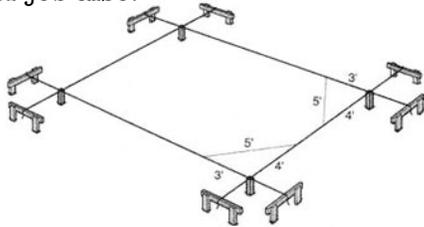
Pea Gravel: This is a traditional material, often associated with English gardens. Very easy and inexpensive, it gives a classic look at a low cost. Installation is simple; just lay it down to a thickness of 3 inches and rake it out. I do not recommend weed cloth or plastic sheeting beneath the pea gravel, but a pre-emergent product is a good idea. Pre-emergence products stop the germination process of seeds.

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How To:

If you choose a manufactured paver, follow the installation directions provided by the manufacturer. The steps below describe in general the basic 'how-to' when installing pavers on sand with a compacted base.

1. Determine the size and shape of the area, based on the expected usage of the space.
2. Layout the shape of the patio area. Shapes that are rectilinear (90° angles) will be easier to do and the end result will look 'cleaner'. Avoiding having to make cuts will make for an easier job also.

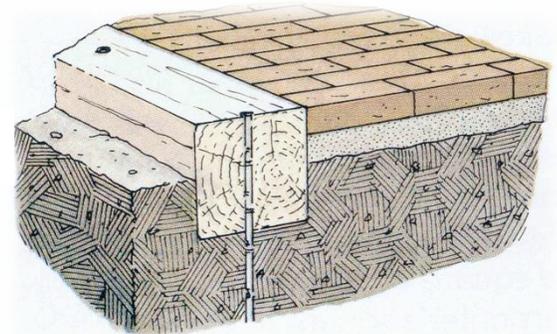
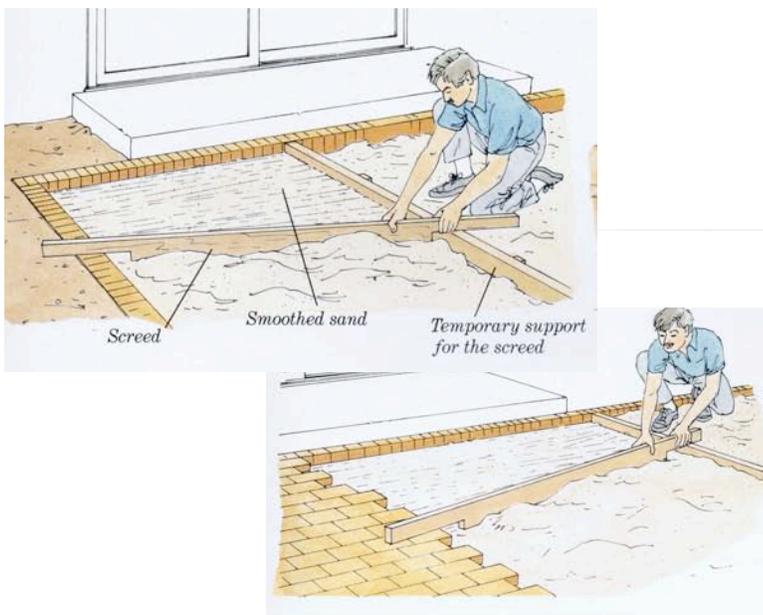


To get square corners use the 3,4,5 rule: if one side is 3 ft & one side is 4 ft the angle connecting the 2 will be 5ft if the corner is square. Multiples of 3,4,5 work also, such as 9,12,15.

3. Excavate the area as marked out, with additional room for the edge restraint. An edge restraint is necessary for most sand set pavers to hold them in place. It can be wood, a concrete mow curb (I like a 4" square shape), a high quality plastic edge restraint made specifically for use with sand set pavers, or a steel edge.
4. Install and compact base of C-mix. This is a mix of pea gravel and sand available at most landscape supply yards. Put down a good 3 inch layer and compact either with a hand help tamper or a gas powered compacter machine that you can rent.
5. Apply 1 to 2 inches of sand and screed to an even thickness to allow for leveling the paving materials.
6. While installing pavers continually check for level.
7. When installing a large area place a piece of plywood down so that you do not kneel on the pavers, which may jostle them out of position.
8. Once all the pavers are set, sweep into the joints, either fine sand, or polymeric sand (a mix of sand and glue) or Portland cement. Water in and let set.



Different edge restraints: above, a plastic type sits on top of the compacted base, below a landscape timber defines the edge and holds bricks in place.



Left: screeding the sand means to level the surface with a board

My Notes: