

Patio Planning & Prep



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Installing a patio or walkway is easy. Dig a hole, put in some gravel, put in some sand, put in some pavers, take a break. Stop right there. When installing a patio or walkway, your first step is to figure out how your clients want it to look when it's finished.

Laura Schwind, a licensed landscape architect with Pine Hall Brick Co., says a crucial first step, especially with patios, is to figure out what the client has in mind.

"Are they going to entertain there?" Schwind asks. "Will it be an outdoor room? Are they busy, and do they want less landscape maintenance? Do they have kids, and do they want to leave enough of a lawn for a play area?"

Asking the client vital questions like this will determine the final outcome and allow you to provide them with a patio or walkway that meets their needs, is aesthetically pleasing and is built to last.

Size matters

An effective method for helping clients determine the size of a patio is to have them gather everything they might want to have on the patio – grill, patio furniture, perhaps some children's toys – and then outline the area with a garden hose, rope or spray paint, Schwind advises.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

If the patio will be located near the back door, perhaps for an outdoor kitchen, and it will have a pergola overhead, suggest clients put up four poles, string some clothesline between them and hang up some sheets. This will help them visualize how big the space beneath the pergola will be.

If your client regularly entertains, suggest they put out enough chairs in the backyard to accommodate guests at one of their gatherings. This allows them to see how big the patio needs to be to comfortably fit those attending a party.

“The idea is to imagine the space,” Schwind says. “Sometimes, people can’t picture in their minds how big the space should be. Sometimes, it can be too small and the space will feel cramped. If it’s too large, clients won’t feel comfortable connecting with nature.”

Paver shapes and patterns

Beyond size, the shape and pattern used to create the patio are important considerations. A patio with curves is less formal than a rectangular or square patio. Paver patterns can also help define or change the scale of the space. From a functional standpoint, the choice of a pattern can minimize cutting, which can help keep costs down. A basketweave pattern is ideal because full pavers can be used throughout in a square or rectangular-shaped installation. Using a running bond or 90-degree herringbone in rectangular areas will only require half cuts, while a 45-degree herringbone requires cuts around the entire perimeter.

The surroundings can also provide design cues, Schwind says. A contemporary home with strong vertical lines might call for a paver with straight lines, and a 1925 Craftsman bungalow might call for a paver that is distressed to look older than it is.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Prepping the base is one of the most crucial steps in creating a patio that is functional and lasts.

“Many folks go with the same color as the house, and others are at the other end of that,” Schwind notes. “With horizontal surfaces, you can go with the same color as the roof. Or you can do the border around the patio in the same color as the house and the field as a complementary color.”

Installation techniques

Start with a careful site review. Call ahead and have underground utilities marked before digging begins. Also, create a plan for moving materials in and out. Have materials delivered as close to the installation site as possible.

The goal is to have the pavers flush with the ground once the installation is complete.

For the installation of a conventional segmental pavement project, dig approximately 7 or 8 inches down and 6 inches out beyond the edge of the paved area to create a solid base for attaching edge restraints. Slope the

soil about 0.25 inch per foot to allow proper drainage. If there's a building nearby, slope the soil away from the building.

For patios and walkways, put down about 4 inches of crusher run (ABC gravel) and compact it well with a plate compactor or hand tamper until it's level and even. For the installation of a driveway, you'll need to dig deeper and put in 8 inches of crusher run gravel.

Once the crusher run is compacted, lay down two lengths of 1-inch PVC pipe, parallel to each other and several feet apart. Cover the pipes with concrete sand (ASTM C33), which is coarse and jagged, and then drag a board across the pipes to screed the sand level.



[Click image to enlarge.](#)

Remove the pipes and use a trowel to fill and smooth the voids. The point is that you are putting down a precisely measured, consistent layer of sand that is exactly 1 inch deep. Don't fill in dips in the base with sand. Correct them with crusher run before the sand layer goes in.

Starting at a corner from the outside, lay the pavers in place, checking string lines frequently for proper alignment. The pavers should be slightly above the level of the surrounding ground to allow for compaction of sand. Stand on the pavers that are laid to continue working without disturbing the sand bed.

Next, install the edge restraints, which can be metal or plastic, and then sweep C33 sand into the joints between the pavers.

Add a protective urethane pad to the plate compactor and compact the pavers into the sand bed. Plywood or a scrap of carpet can be substituted for the pad. The point is to keep the compactor from chipping the edges of pavers.

Sweep more sand into the joints until all are completely filled in. Go back several weeks after the installation to add more sand into the joints. It's crucial for the sand to completely fill the joints.