

How to... lay a patio

In part two of our DIY series, **Kevin Smith** shows how to lay perfect paving. Photos by Jason Ingram

A decent patio is usually right at the top of most gardeners' wish lists – a multi-purpose space where you can display your plants, entertain, and relax with family and friends. And one of the most effective ways of creating the patio you want is to lay individual paving slabs, something most of us can have a go at.

Don't worry if you've never done any hard landscaping before, as our simple

guide will lead you through each step of the process. We chose to use slate paving, but the choice of materials is endless (from sandstone to York stone to concrete), with something to suit every budget. Whatever material you go for, the method is identical.

November is the perfect time to get cracking on a hard-landscaping project, as there are fewer plant-based projects to keep you occupied.

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This step-by-step guide will make laying a patio and achieving a professional finish a breeze, we promise! The key to success lies in the preparation, and if you get the ground even at the start, and cover it with hardcore rubble (you'll find this at most builders' merchants sold as MOT), you won't go wrong. We recommend you use a wacker plate to level the ground (see our tools list, right). Traditionally used to compact the sand base of driveways, it's also great for ironing out bumps in the ground.

Although not essential, it may help to draw a scale plan of your patio so you can work out the shape and pattern of the slabs, along with the exact amount of materials you will need.

WE USED Materials

Hardcore material, MOT type 1 (Wickes, £35 per 850kg bag, 0870 608 9001, www.wickes.co.uk for your nearest branch)
Building sand (Wickes, £30 per 900kg bag, details as above)
Cement (Wickes, £3.29 for a 25kg bag, details as above)
Natural slate Midnight Blue paving (Marshalls, from £32 per sq m, 0870 120 7474, www.marshalls.co.uk for stockists)
Woburn rumbled pavioours (Bradstone, from £19.08 per sq m, 01335 372 289, www.bradstone.com for stockists)

Tools

Shovel, rake, wheelbarrow, wooden level pegs, hammer, spirit level, plank of wood, wacker plate, cement mixer, rubber mallet, bolster chisel, pointing trowel. For tool hire, try www.hss.co.uk



1 First, remove any turf, plants or paving to a depth of about 15cm (6in) to allow room for the hardcore, mortar and paving slabs. Now barrow in a 5-8cm (2-3in) layer of hardcore. Use a rake to distribute it, and even out any bumps. The rubble will form a good solid base for the patio and will stop you, and the site, getting muddy if it rains during construction.

5 Make a mortar mix of five parts building sand to one part cement. If you're only laying a small patio, you could do the mixing in a wheelbarrow, although generally it'll be quicker and easier to hire an electric cement mixer (see our tools list, above). Mix more mortar as and when you need it.



2 Use a wacker plate to compact and level the hardcore. Although not essential, this stops the rubble moving around while you lay the slabs, making the base solid.



6 Lay each slab on a bed of mortar that's about 5-8cm (2-3in) deep, tapping it down firmly with a rubber mallet or pressing down with your hands.



3 Wooden pegs hammered into the ground to the same height will mark the level surface of the patio, and you need to make sure they are level with any existing paving and manhole covers. Position several all over the patio site for you to work with, using a spirit level to ensure they are all even. If the patio is next to the house, it's important to include a slight gradient away from the building, so that rainwater simply runs off into an area where it can be soaked up. Again, use a spirit level to help create a steady gradient.



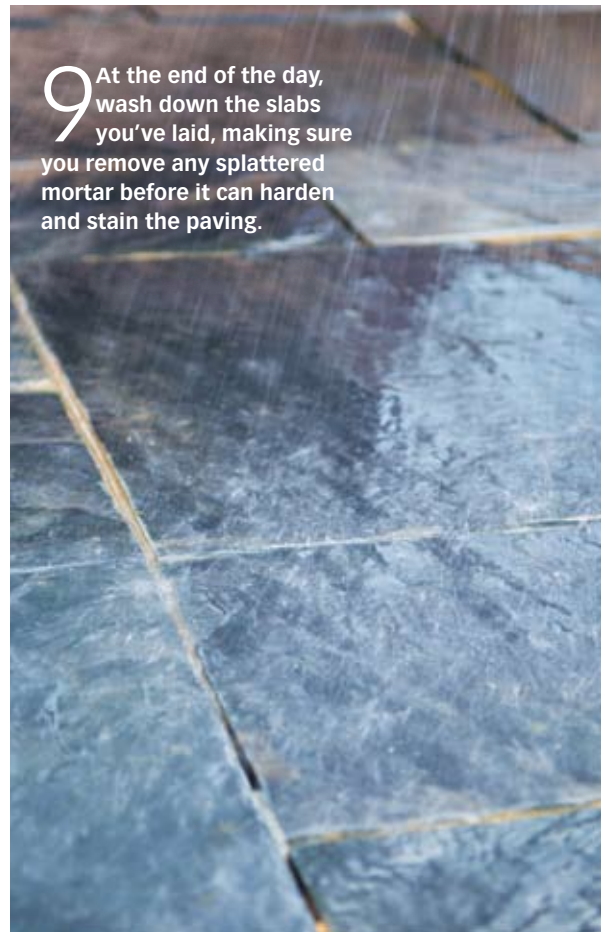
7 You need to leave a 1cm (1/2in) gap between each slab, which you'll fill in later with mortar. As you progress, use your spirit level or a plank of wood to ensure the slabs are level with the pegs you banged into the ground earlier.



4 If, like me, you want a patio with a random design, place several slabs on the ground to work out which shapes work and interlock well together. Alternatively, cut out pieces of paper to represent scaled-down slabs and work out a design on your scale plan.

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8 Edge the patio with paviours, laying them on a 5-8cm (2-3in) layer of mortar, as you did with the slabs. Butt them up together and, for a neat fit, use a hammer and bolster chisel to break paviours where necessary.



9 At the end of the day, wash down the slabs you've laid, making sure you remove any splattered mortar before it can harden and stain the paving.



10 Fill the gaps between the paving slabs using a pointing trowel and the same mortar mix as you used before. Try not to get mortar on the slab surfaces, as again this will stain if it's allowed to set.

11 So that's a job well done! Now simply enjoy choosing your garden furniture, then sit back and relax in the knowledge that you've created a professionally finished patio you'll appreciate for many years to come.



NEXT MONTH:
Lay a stepping
stone path