



The Ultimate Guide to  
**HARDSCAPES**

# Table of Contents

If you know where you're going, go ahead and click on a chapter.

<b>Introduction:</b> The Ultimate Guide to Hardscapes	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1:</b> Hardscape Planning 101	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2:</b> Types of Hardscaping Ideas and Backyard Landscaping	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 3:</b> Deck and Patio Hardscaping	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Courtyard Hardscaping Ideas	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 5:</b> Retaining Wall and Fence Hardscaping	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 6:</b> Edging Stone Hardscape Design	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 7:</b> Walkway and Path Hardscaping Ideas	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 8:</b> Arbor and Pergola Backyard Landscaping	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusion:</b> The Benefits of Hardscaping for Your Home — and for You	<b>20</b>

# Introduction: The Ultimate Guide to Hardscapes

## Everything You Need to Know and Prep for Your Next Hardscaping Ideas

Our homes are where we put up our feet, where we rest, where we let ourselves laugh and be at leisure. It's where we gather friends, family and neighbors, where we spend countless hours, and where we invest hard-earned money to make it our own.

Most importantly, our home reflects us. We design it — inside and out — to match our values and personalities, then let our lives unfold within.

If the home is where the heart is, then at Nitterhouse Masonry Products, we think the land and features surrounding it should be equally cherished.

Homeowners invest [nearly a tenth of their home's value](#) into upgrading or renovating its hardscaping designs and features. And it's not hard to see why! These outdoor additions add a functional yet aesthetic appeal to a property that goes well beyond an admirer's passing glance — and can raise the value of your whole home.

Hardscaping ideas are endless. From elegant patios and outdoor kitchens to stone fencing and walkways with the perfect paver pattern, a hardscaping design is an achievable — and cost-effective — upgrade to your home. Hardscaping doesn't have to be a series of hard design choices or either-ors.

When it comes to landscaping versus hardscaping, the best projects incorporate the two and stay on budget.

## **Hardscape Planning Information They Won't Teach You in Stores**

Inside our Ultimate Guide to Hardscapes, you'll find information on planning home-improvement landscaping endeavors:

- Hardscape designs and overview
- Front yard and backyard hardscaping ideas
- Costs and budgeting
- Tools and materials
- Insider installation tips and tricks
- Backyard hardscaping and landscaping hacks

Creating a hardscape design doesn't have to take months of stress or a huge budget. With a little planning, a little research and an eye for creativity, you can achieve a hardscape design fitting of the place you call home.

# Chapter 1: Hardscape Planning 101: Preparing Any Backyard Landscaping and Hardscaping Project

Congratulations! You've decided to put on your do-it-yourself hardscaping hat — or, at least, reach for it — and create the yard of your dreams.

Whether that dream involves brickwork, retaining walls, patios, new plantings, pavers or all the above, you're taking the next step to increase the value, appeal and personality of your home.

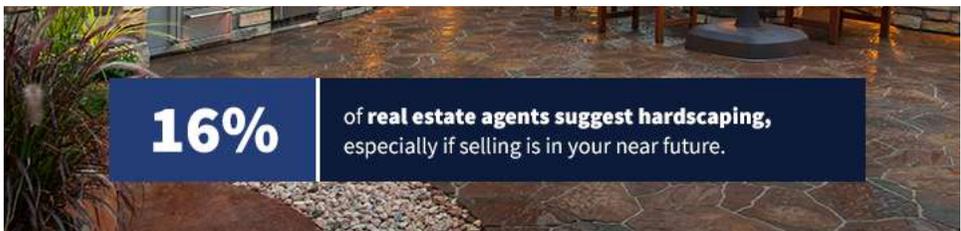
Every hardscaping project has to start somewhere. While planning a hardscape project can be a balancing act of wants and needs, creative inspiration with practical preparation, we've broken down the basics to keep in mind as you consider adding a hardscape feature to your home's exterior.

## What to Know Before Hardscaping

Many people — from seasoned designers to ardent do-it-yourselfers — begin their project with lots of ideas and excitement, seeing their front and backyards as blank canvases. While you don't need an expert landscaper or outside contractor to execute every hardscape detail properly, you also don't need to overwhelm or overcomplicate project planning, ultimately ruining its creative spirit.

A well-designed hardscape can increase the value of your home — [and 16 percent of real estate agents suggest it](#), especially if selling is in your near future.

In this chapter, we outline a step-by-step checklist to plan your hardscape project.



## How to Plan a Hardscape Project

Having the foresight to make proper preparations is perhaps the most essential step in any quality hardscape endeavor — and the most overlooked. Avoid costly surprises and an unfortunate end design by performing the following steps:

### 1. Do a Site Analysis

Before anything, complete a detailed and thorough analysis of the natural features of your property. A complete site analysis should evaluate the following:

- Natural hills and slopes
- Soil type
- Rocks and other heavy impediments
- Current foliage
- Water and drainage
- Required maintenance

Consider all this alongside the spatial dimensions of your upcoming installation. What is the actual space you can work with? Be honest with yourself. Don't cram too much hardscaping into too little square footage or leave large patches blank.

Then, ask yourself if your hardscaping vision aligns with your terrain's practical realities. The goal of your project is to show off the physical land to make your yard its best possible self. Work smarter, not harder, to enhance what's already there.

### 2. Set the Budget

Several variables will determine the price of a hardscaping project. The earlier you can estimate them, the better your project management and execution will be.

A final budget in planning for your hardscaping should account for:

- **All hardscaping materials**, raw and manufactured.
- **All landscaping manipulation**, such as costs associated with redirecting drainage, new codes or permits.
- **Decorative yard items**, including softscaping, flowers, plantings, benches and fencing.
- **Tools**, bought or rented.
- **Labor**, if bringing in professional help.

To give you [a few examples](#), the average cost for a deck in 2017 was \$7,086. The average price for a newly installed cement patio or hardscaped walkway hovered a little over \$3,000.

Remember, these numbers are merely broad estimates, not hard and fast rules. The final budget in planning for your hardscaping project should never stray from personal comfort.



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### **3. Research Area Building Regulations and Permits**

Next, check all hardscaping codes, building requirements, zoning laws and necessary permits required by your municipality.

You can do so through a simple Internet search of your city followed by “residential ordinances” or “code of ordinances.” You can direct any questions that arise to your local ordinance board or similar representatives.

Investigate if your area requires an on-site municipal inspection before beginning your project. Otherwise, you risk violations that halt hardscaping — or worse, state you must take down or remove anything you’ve already invested time and money into.

Finally, if your neighborhood is part of a home owner’s association, or HOA, there may be additional regulations and necessary permits.

#### **4. Select Hardscaping Tools and Materials, Receive Samples**

While it’s impossible to predict every single tool or piece of equipment you’ll need over the course of your backyard hardscaping project, there is a list of conventional materials and resources you’ll more than likely need to bring your hardscape design to life.

Considering tools and materials beforehand helps you stick to a budget and an efficient project timeline. [Common hardscape materials](#) include:

- **Concrete:** Poured by a professional or mixed yourself using a cement mix, sand, ground stones or gravel and water.
- **Brick:** [Clay or concrete bricks](#) across dozens of cuts and colors.
- **Natural or faux wood:** For attached or standing decks, pergolas and arbors.
- **Tile:** Decorative tiles to add pop to terraces, stairs, retaining walls, patios or walkways.
- **Pavers:** In a range of [backyard pavers and driveway paver stones](#) for an aesthetic upgrade.
- **Stone:** Veneer and natural stone to polish a final hardscape design.
- **Landscaping Stone:** Loose stone or rocks available in a variety of shapes and sizes for walkways or around plants in place of mulch.

Ask for material samples at your local store. Compare what materials will function best in your space, as well as what fits your ideal installation, maintenance and labor upkeep.

# Chapter 2: Types of Hardscaping Ideas and Backyard Landscaping

You've got the basics of how to plan and prepare your hardscaping project under your belt. You probably have ideas of what you'd like to build, where you'd like to build it and how much you'd like to spend.

Now let's explore the full versatility in types of hardscaping projects and clarify some often-confused terminology — the difference between hardscaping, softscaping and landscaping — plus how you can tie them all seamlessly together.

## What Is Hardscaping?

Hardscaping refers to all the fixed, unmovable features of your home or property's exterior.

Think of hardscaping as its name implies — solid materials, strong surfaces and durable installations meant to last untarnished for years. The most [popular residential hardscapes](#) include things such as decks, patios, outdoor stairs and stepping stones, walkways, driveways, garden walls, fire pits, terraces, edging stones and outdoor lighting.

## What Is Softscaping?

Related but not quite identical, softscaping includes all the moveable, typically green designs and exterior detailing of a home or property.

Think of softscaping as ornamental — the trees, flowers, shrubs and decorative enhancements that infuse the full spectrum of nature into your yard.

## What Is Landscaping?



Landscaping is the umbrella term for hardscaping and softscaping designs put together. Landscaping harmonizes both these projects into one.

Think of it like this: Softscaping is often incorporated into a hardscape's finished product, but softscaping doesn't necessarily entail a hardscape. The two elements combine to create the ever-popular art of landscaping.

## Types of Hardscaping Projects

There are over a dozen hardscaping projects, additions and features available to boost the look and feel of a yard. The [major hardscape project installations and categories](#) include:

- Decks and patios
- Courtyards and terraces
- Fences and retaining walls
- Edging stones
- Walkways and paved paths
- Arbors and pergolas

## **Each Major Hardscaping Installation Is Outlined in the Following Chapters**

The best hardscape design ideas exist to amplify the ambiance and extraordinary beauty of nature. Continue through “The Ultimate Guide to Hardscapes” to learn how you can achieve this balance.

Each subsequent chapter features the in-depth, step-by-step process of a major hardscape installation project. Perhaps you have yours already in mind and are looking for specific planning, construction and development tips. Or, you’re getting ready to dip in your do-it-yourself toes, considering all hardscaping options to find what works best for you.

Check out the tools and materials, styling tricks and installation overviews below to realize your home’s dream hardscape.

# Chapter 3: Deck and Patio Hardscaping

Building a deck or patio can increase the living space functionality of a home. These spaces are cost-effective and straightforward projects that can also [significantly boost property values](#) — and property appeal.

From hosting family barbecues and birthday parties to a quiet, relaxing outdoor retreat, decks and patios are the most versatile hardscaping projects you can add to your backyard.

They are as eye-catching as they are functional. You can build them large or small, fit to host the whole neighborhood or the tucked-away respite for a relaxing drink after work. Patio design ideas and hardscaped decks are numerous and trending. We've got you covered on where to start.

## Decks and Patios Are Popular Backyard Landscaping Additions

Over [87 percent of prospective homebuyers list backyard living space](#) as one of the home features they desire most.



Such a coveted nature makes decks and patios a go-to upgrade when looking to increase the return on investment of your home. With proper seasonal care and basic cleaning maintenance, patios and decks are also one of the easiest hardscapes to keep from depreciating.

There's one crucial difference between the two, though — level location.

Hardscaped patios are typically ground level, made from poured concrete, [patio pavers](#) or concrete pavers fixed into a flat surface area. Concrete can be purchased pre-mixed or blended and poured yourself. Pavers come in a range of interlocking or architectural paver patterns and are ideal for a more luxe, elegant installation look.

On the other hand, hardscaped decks tend to be freestanding or attached structures that sit above ground level. They are typically made from wood or wood composite.

Let's walk through the planning and construction needs of building a patio or deck.

## Deck or Patio Materials

Decks and patios are frequently constructed from these materials, which you can sample at your local hardware store or masonry distributor:

- **Stonework:** Laid stonework is perfect for courtyards and patio entryways aiming for a classical, European ambiance.
- **Tile:** Ornate and chic, tiles are a stand-out base or trim material to add to hardscaped patios and decks alike.
- **Pavers:** Patio pavers blend the look of stone and tile in an easy-to-install base material great for walkways, driveways and garden patios.
- **Brick:** Clay, concrete or stone blends to enhance the character of decks and patios.
- **Poured concrete:** The most user- and budget-friendly of all patio material bases.
- **Natural wood:** The classic and cozy base of attached or freestanding decks that are so popular today.
- **Wood composite:** Achieving the same timeless look as wood, but with a longer lifespan and often a smaller price tag.

## Tools for Installing a Deck and Patio

Building a deck or patio may seem daunting. You might think you need a contractor and professional crew to measure appropriately, dig, construct and finish this outdoor space — much less make sure the final product remains stable and secure!

Both of these hardscape projects actually come down to a few surprisingly straightforward steps. With the following tools and procedural steps, you will have everything you need for this hardscape project:

- **Layout and measuring:** Industrial measuring tape, chalk or paint box, batter boards, construction twine, carpenter's square, speed squares.
- **Excavation:** Shovel or sod cutter to clear the installation area, drain spade to dig post holes, various clamps to secure perimeter.
- **Construction:** Jig and screw kits, adjustable or crescent wrench, hand sledge, pliers, circular saw, jigsaw, reciprocating saw, masonry or metal grinder, hammers, nails, nailers.
- **General:** Table saw, power nailer, nail gun and compressor, router, hand sanders.

## What to Know Before Building a Deck or Patio

All backyard landscaping projects, including outdoor living space projects such as decks and patios, need you to consider the following:

1. **Research area building regulations and permits.** Additionally, check there are no utility lines — such as gas, sewage or power — running beneath your intended patio plot.
2. **Determine freestanding or attached.** Freestanding decks and patios are installed more than one inch from a house as their own individual features. Attached decks and patios, on the other hand, are connected directly to a building or residence.

3. **Account for furniture, windows and doors.** When measuring floorboard heights, dimensions and railings for home-attached decks, don't make the rookie mistake of forgetting window and door practicalities. Install the height of your deck floor so there's space for doors to smoothly open and windows don't become obstructed.
4. **Mark deck or patio height.** Remember to measure and mark everything beforehand to get an accurate building framework. A few notes to consider:
  - Don't forget the dimensions of boards, bolts and joints themselves. These will add a little extra onto the final height of your deck or patio.
  - Keep this entire height below any attached door's opening threshold.
  - Mark both the patio width and the height along your house or building.
5. **Pick a material aligned with your budget.** Concrete and wood fall on the most economical side, while pavers sit in the middle and tiles and brickwork will need larger budgets.
6. **Do it yourself or hire a crew.** Again, be honest with your comfort levels and budget.
7. **Don't fight nature — design according to your yard.** Unless you're willing to enact significant yard re-shaping, re-sloping, re-drainage and permits, complement the shapes, hills and curves you already have.

## Deck and Patio Tips and Tricks

This final insider information will help you hack your way to a better-hardscaped deck or patio, one board or brick at a time:

1. **Style your base materials.** Consider the layout and patterns you can make with your chosen materials, such as basket weaving deck boards or adding decorative accent tiles to steps, caps and posts. Or you can opt for pavers and learn how to choose the right paver for your project by [browsing the dozens of options](#) within masonry catalogs.
2. **Consider weather and climate.** How will the climate conditions of your area affect your desired building material? What kind of treatments will be necessary to preserve the chosen wood, stone or tiling?



3. **Be safe.** Most residential decks come designed with a [load-bearing weight of 60 pounds per foot](#). Going overboard with deck or patio furniture, outdoor kitchens, hot tubs or even too many guests will spell serious structural and safety concerns.
4. **Allow for drainage.** Space boards according to the manufacturer's instructions to allow for proper water runoff between.
5. **Add finishing touches.** Whether it's decorative trim, post caps, skirting, outdoor lighting, plantings or tree and brush foliage — whatever you can think of — crown your deck or patio with the adornments all your hard work deserves.

# Chapter 4: Courtyard Hardscaping Ideas

Courtyards are a beautiful and refined addition to any residency, be it part of a grand front entryway, a backyard terrace or a stylish garden getaway. They add charm and refinement to your home and are easy additions to pair with other hardscape features, such as outdoor dining, retaining walls, planter pots and urns or garden benches — to name a few.

However, courtyards come with their own unique considerations, materials, design trends and tricks of the trade. Rather than seeing courtyards as simple plots of foot tiles or stones placed on the ground, hardscaping aficionados know stone or paver courtyards can transform the look and feel of an entire space.

Landscapes go from ordinary to elegant with a few square yards of these installations.

## Courtyard Materials

Courtyards tend to be paved from three primary materials: Stone, brick and pavers. Each one comes with its own subsequent price tag, durability and maintenance precautions.

Courtyards tend to be paved from three **primary materials:**



Stone

Brick

Pavers

- **Stone:** Installing stone courtyards may come with the highest price tag, depending on stone cut, treatment and sourcing. Yet stone's durability and strength alone can make it worth the budget.

- **Brick:** Likewise, real brick hardscaped courtyards range in pricing and stability. While clay and concrete bricks alike come in multiple cuts and colors, they are prone to chipping. Brickwork is also vulnerable to cracks and surface damage from not only rain and the elements, but weeds and other foliage burrowing around their base. Prices for brick courtyards fluctuate, running as low as \$5 per square foot to as high as \$60 per square foot.
- **Paver:** Finally, installing paver courtyards takes elements of stone and brick. Since landscape pavers themselves can be made from either of these materials — and more — [paver prices average](#) between \$3 and \$20 per square foot of paver installation.

## Tools for Installing Hardscaped Courtyard

[Installing a hardscaped courtyard](#) would be a difficult job without the following steps and tools:

- **Layout and measuring:** Industrial measuring tape, chalk or paint box, stakes and string, construction twine, carpenter's square or speed square.
- **Excavation:** Shovel or sod cutter to clear the installation area, chalk, paint box and stakes and string to outline perimeter, trowels for detailed digging.
- **Construction:** Masonry saw or splitter, vibrating plate compactor, hand sledge, masonry or metal grinder, shovels, trowels, brooms, grading rake.
- **General:** Hand levels, rubber or stone mallet, hand sanders, concrete sand, mortar or a similar binding mix.

## What to Know Before Installing a Courtyard

It's easy to see the steps of installing a courtyard as merely clearing a little yard then placing some stones or pavers.

While that is indeed the gist of it, ensure you're plotting, placing and landscaping your stone, brick or paver courtyard correctly from the get-go by planning the following details:

1. **Location, location, location.** Review the functional and aesthetic aspects of where you wish to lay your new courtyard. Consider the desired amount of privacy, sunlight and

shade, and weather patterns like rainfall and wind. Also, consider that desired area's soil type — soft and supple or clay-like and dense — alongside slopes, slants and potentially tricky dimensions. All this will affect the long-term condition of your chosen courtyard material.

- 2. Colors and patterns.** The colors and patterns of your courtyard's foundation will set the tone for the space. Are you looking for warm hues of sandstone, rustic blends with reds and russet browns, marble accents, earthy limestone tones, or classic monochromatic stones? Do you want solid matte or a pearly finish? Do you want a smooth or textured courtyard, with even-cut blocks or a stylishly arranged mix of shapes?
- 3. Complementary landscaping.** Your courtyard will appear bare and dull without accent vegetation, potted flowers, shrubs and other decorative green elements.
- 4. Inviting lighting.** Ensure your courtyard is cozy and well-lit day or night with an attractive suite of outdoor lighting.
- 5. Sound.** Sound-reducing, refracting or even [white-noise design features for backyard or garden courtyards](#) can help make them private escape from the outside world. Place retaining walls, fencing, water features and vegetation strategically.

## Hardscaped Courtyard Tips and Tricks

To maximize the lifespan and look of your courtyard installation — regardless of what material you used — make sure to follow these tips and tricks:

- 1. Order extra paving materials.** It's one of the time-tested tips in the industry — always order a few more square feet of pavers, bricks or stones than you initially estimate. That way, you'll have plenty to spare in case your design takes a turn or materials arrive damaged.
- 2. Use a sealant.** Sealants increase the durability of courtyard materials, protecting them from the elements and surrounding horticultural wear and tear.
- 3. Don't be afraid to decorate.** Use containers or hanging gardens, potted plants, water features and more to beautify the new feature.
- 4. Use a mix of built-in and portable furniture.** Varied outdoor seating is not only pleasing on the eye but far more functional when you need to swap or change the use of the space.

# Chapter 5: Retaining Wall and Fence Hardscaping

For hilly or sloped landscaping, there are few features as attractive as retaining walls and fences.

Retaining walls hold back and contain soil and dirt, allowing you to maximize the use and spatial capacity of your yard even if it holds unfavorable terrain. Likewise, hardscaped fences lend privacy and security without sacrificing beauty or making your yard feel claustrophobic.

When installed separately or paired together, hardscaped fences and retaining walls lend structure and direction to your yard — both literally and figuratively.

This is the time to hire a professional. If you need a true retaining wall, you must work with a professional, certified contractor who can engineer a wall to properly retain earth. Improperly engineered and installed walls often fail, causing you to spend more time and money to fix it than if it had been done correctly the first time.



## Fence and Retaining Wall Materials

Hardstone fences and retaining walls are traditionally constructed from these base materials:

- **Concrete blocks:** Don't let the word concrete fool you. These blocks are cut and colored for maximum aesthetic appeal and made for high-quality ground face or split face architectural patterns.
- **Masonry stone blocks:** Solid and [veneer stone blocks](#) give walls or fences a more polished and distinct look. Walls or fences can be made of solid stone while veneer can be added to a fence surface to give the impression of solid stone blocks.
- **Boulders or rocks:** These can be layered and bound together using contemporary mortars and adhesive binding.
- **Brick:** As with other hardscaping materials such as courtyards or patios, brick makes a simple yet standout base for yard dividers, fences and structural retaining walls alike.

## Tools for Installing Hardscaped Retaining Wall or Fence

The tools and equipment needed to install hardscape fences or retaining walls are practically toolbelt cousins. Purchase or rent the following pieces to get started on your project:

- **Layout and measuring:** Industrial measuring tape, marking chalk or paint, mason line, levelers, landscape stakes.
- **Excavation:** Shovel or sod cutter to clear the installation area, a shovel to dig a base trench.
- **Construction:** Circular saw, masonry saw blades, caulk gun, speed square, drilling hammer, garden rake.
- **General tools:** Table saw, tape measure, rubber mallet, chisel, concrete sand, mortar or a similar binding mix.

## What to Know Before Installing a Hardscaped Fence or Retaining Wall

You can be fully satisfied with a safe and secure retaining wall or fence around your property when you perform the subsequent preparations beforehand:

- 1. Slope angles and degrees.** Retaining walls need to account for the constant physical forces at work on them. [Terracing design and engineering elements](#) should be used to install the strongest, most secure retaining walls to prevent gravitational give or lateral earth pressure.
- 2. Know your lines.** Property, frost and utility lines, that is. Check and then double check all these before you start digging.
- 3. Permanency.** More so than their wooden-fenced counterparts, hardscaped retaining walls built from masonry or stone veneer will be much longer lasting and far more durable. Ensure you're selecting and building exactly what you want, where you want it.
- 4. Coloration.** Different stones and block types will come with different colorations that will change over time. While you can't prevent this, you can slow discoloration and brick or stone wall chipping over time with sealants.
- 5. Caps.** [Wall and post caps](#) sit as the topmost layer on retaining walls and solid fences. They are as much about form as they are function, and neatly tighten the finished look of this hardscaped installation.
- 6. Maintenance.** As certain stone types age, they may be more likely to require fills, repairs and cosmetic or structural attention. Even today's segmented, interlocking retaining walls constructed without the need for mortar still needs maintenance occasionally.
- 7. Drainage.** Retaining walls need to properly drain water and other small particle debris. This is achieved through installing a fabric-coated drainage pipe near the wall's base, weighed down by gravel to prevent expensive clogs.

## Fence and Retaining Wall Tips and Tricks

Building a retaining wall is a much easier process today than it was decades ago. Many retaining wall orders come with a "[built-in engineering" block design](#), meaning blocks are pre-cut and shaped to stack and lock without the use of mortar.

When building your hardscaped fence or retaining wall:

1. **Purchase extra materials.** As with courtyards and most other hardware projects in this guide, opt to order five to 10 percent more base materials than will likely be needed. This provides wiggle room in the event stones or blocks are damaged, or you decide to expand upon your initial projection.
2. **The base is everything.** A compact, smooth, even support for solid fences and retaining walls maintain their entire structural integrity through the years.
3. **Keep an eye on that drain.** Blocked or improperly cared for drains [are the leading cause of retaining wall failure.](#)



# Chapter 6: Edging Stone Hardscape Design

As low maintenance as they are visually appealing, [edging stones](#) are a straightforward hardscaping design you've likely seen everywhere — and might have never noticed.

Edging stones take the cake regarding under-the-radar backyard landscaping ideas. They add refinement and a tailored, finishing stamp to any garden, walkway, path, driveway or space they border. We guarantee even the greenest, inexperienced do-it-yourselfer can upgrade their home's landscaping by adding edging stones.

## What Are Edging Stones?

If you're looking for an accessible, one-day hardscape project to instantly upscale the features of your current yard, look no further than edging stones.

Simply put, edging stones are borders that trace around a hardscape or softscape area. They're typically made of bricks or stones laid perpendicularly to a landscaped area, nestling rocks or grass and keeping those terrains in their place.



**Edging stones are borders** that trace around a hardscape or softscape area.

You're most likely to find hardscaped edging stones tracing a walkway or around trees and larger plantings, though more creative uses can be easily imagined by taking a walk around your yard.

## Edging Stones Materials

Since edging stones are laid in the same manner regardless of chosen material, you should make your selection based on what best fits your home's personality and ideal project vision.

Edging stones can be fashioned from natural or manufactured materials. They can be made to look like bricks, masonry stones, interlocking stones or blocks. Likewise, their coloration and textures will be based on these material foundations.

The most common natural edging stones include limestone and sandstone. You can also easily find neat and easy to install interlocking edging stones with straight or curved cuts.

## Tools for Installing Edging Stones

You probably already own most of the tools to set solid yet striking edging stones, tucked away in your garage or shed:

- Spade shovel or motorized edging tool, for initial digging.
- Gardening trowels, for more detailed and exact digging.
- Backfill material, such as mulch, soil or decorative rocks.
- Gravel or crushed rocks. You'll use this as a buffer layer, sprinkling gravel along the base of your dug trench and right underneath any stones.

## What to Know Before Installing Edging Stones

While this hardscape design doesn't require the most intense labor, advanced toolkit or even time, there is still merit in planning out the pattern your edging stones:

- 1. Order stones ahead.** Plan your edging-stone material order carefully, detailing exact size, color and cut. Ask for samples if you're stuck between types, or inquire about durability and weather resistance.



Order both  
**curved**  
and  
**straight**  
edging  
stone cuts.

- 2. Work with your natural landscape.** Order both curved and straight cuts to match the natural lines and terrain type of the surroundings. Make sure your stones have a little texture, too — especially if they're lining smooth surfaces such as driveways or walking paths.
- 3. Gravel or compact rock base.** To prevent stones or bricks from sinking over time, as well as to allow proper ground drainage beneath your stone edges, sprinkle a layer of gravel or crushed rocks immediately after digging your trench.
- 4. Half-and-half digging rule.** You'll want trenches deep enough to engulf the bottom half of your edging stones but not so deep they swallow them whole. This balance ensures robust and permanent stone lines.
- 5. Take your time.** When working with blocks, stones and bricks, align and place carefully. Even though these materials are easily moveable, once you've dug your base trench, you want to ensure your fit pieces together like a puzzle.

## Edging Stones Tips and Tricks

There's no need to complicate something as fundamental or fuss-free as edging stone installation. Laying out your hardscaped edging stones will be even more comfortable with these insider tricks in mind:

- 1. Compact your base gravel tight — but not too tight.** You need a light gravel layer to create a drainage flow solution and keep your stones from getting sunken and waterlogged. Yet you don't want to add so much gravel in there you disrupt the natural composition of the soil.
- 2. Backfill as you work.** It won't take much, but adding extra dirt, soil or mulch as you edge will maintain the overall look.
- 3. Plan for ideal height.** Since a good portion of edging will be hidden as its laid into its trench, plan material sizing and visuals accordingly. You don't want too much of your beautiful bricks or stones swallowed up, negating the whole feature.

# Chapter 7: Walkway and Path Hardscaping Ideas

## Chapter 7: Walkway and Path Hardscaping Ideas

Hardscaped paver and stone paths have seen a resurgence in popularity over the past decade. Both for their durability and their design pops, these creative walkways can give your home a polished and elevated look — or help it stand out from neighboring properties.

What's more, they're easy to install and relatively economical. Few projects will lend the kind of simple facelift to the exterior of your property like updating or installing a new walkway.

Hardscaped paths are most often built from pavers. We've mentioned pavers before because they can be a reliable choice. Knowing the ins-and-outs of pavers and paving stone options will translate into a more successful — and more hardwearing — path or hardscape walkway.



### Walkway and Path Materials

How to choose the right paver for your project begins with knowing the top three paver varieties:

- **Concrete pavers:** These are the most prominent landscaping walkway base. They're often fashioned into collections, with stone mixes cut into complementary shapes and sizes and laid out in a chosen aesthetic pattern. [Contemporary concrete paver](#) installation relies on interlocking placements to make installation a breeze.
- **Brick pavers:** Like concrete pavers, brick pavers offer cuts and colors that piece together to create a highly attractive finished landscaped path.
- **Stone pavers:** Natural and manufactured stone pavers often aim to replicate the look and feel of slate or marble. For a higher cost, you can opt for real stone, though many paver manufacturers produce more durable and versatile synthetic cuts which look identical to their natural cousins.

Ground installation of your chosen paver will also require:

- **Leveling sand,** to pour into the initial shallow-dug trench.
- **Base paver panels,** to layer between leveling sand and pavers.
- **Polymeric sand or mortar filler,** if using traditional pavers and not interlocking ones.

## Tools for Installing Hardscaped Paver Paths and Walkways

The smoothest and most professional hardscaped pathways require a short list of tools for foundation digging and installation:

- **Excavation:** Spade shovel, hand or vibrating plate compactor, wheelbarrow, garden rake.
- **Construction:** Rubber mallet or hand sledge, masonry or metal grinder, trowels, drilling hammer or chiseler.
- **General:** Hand sanders, concrete sand, mortar filler or polymeric sand.

## What to Know Before Installing Hardscaped Paver Paths

The steps to install paver walkways, driveways or paths are intuitive. Yet before you start digging away, leaving your yard full of pathway trenches, have the following squared away:

1. **Determine your paver pattern.** [Paver patterns](#) are where creativity meets curb appeal. Paver pattern determines not only the size and shape of each stone but how they get arranged in your final layout.
  - **Running bond** paver patterns are the most popular styling. Stones or bricks are laid in straight, horizontal or vertical lines, with each row slightly offset or out-of-line with the adjacent ones.
  - **Jack-on-Jack**, or stacked bond, paver patterns are a more exact version of running bond. Bricks and stones are arranged in symmetrical, even lines to create column-like rows.
  - **Herringbone** is another widespread paver pattern, where stones or bricks run in parallel, 45- to 90-degree lines, creating a zig-zag effect.
  - **Pinwheel paver** patterns are fashioned after the windmill-like design of the paper ornament. Stones are laid in geometric or circular groupings that mirror the whimsy of a pinwheel.
2. **Prepare for curves and hills.** Elevated terrains don't make paver pathways impossible. But they do mean you'll need to cut and arrange special pavers on these areas.
3. **Pack sand as even and smooth as possible.** There are specific tools you can use to accomplish this. Or you can take a wooden board and run it across the length of your poured sand to ensure an even, tight foundational layer.
4. **Blueprint your paver placement ahead of time.** That way, when it comes time to lay and lock stones, you merely have to follow the slotted design. Never rely on on-the-spot-visuals to assess a symmetrical pattern.
5. **Trim away excess paver panel edges before layering pavers.** Use a masonry or metal grinder to trim large pavers and a hand stone sander to exact smooth edges. It will improve your final design.
6. **Use polymeric jointing sand.** It's formulated to provide the best, moisture-resistant bond between pavers.



Walkways should slope away from a home or building to allow **proper drainage**.

## Hardscaped Walkway and Paver Path Tips and Tricks

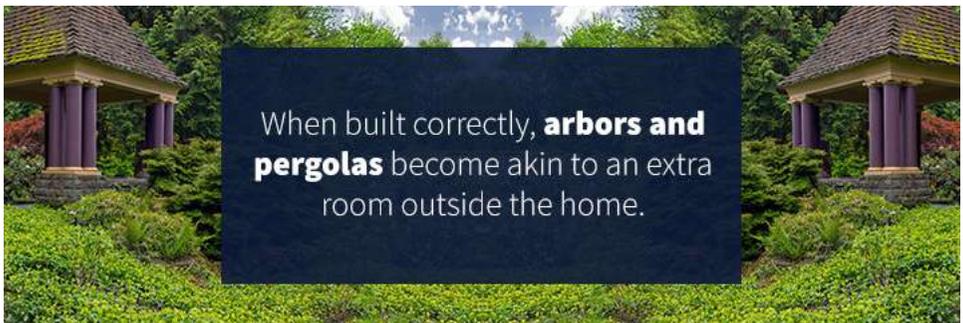
As with any hardscape project, hardscaped paths and walkways have their own insider tricks:

- 1. Slope away from the house.** Walkways should slope away from a home or building to allow proper drainage. If possible, follow the natural slope of a yard, or use [the sloping rule-of-thumb](#) to dig trenches ¼-inch deeper for every foot of a hardscaped path laid farther from the house.
- 2. Work from the outside in.** Outline a walkway's edges with peripheral pavers first, then work in.
- 3. Leave room between each paver.** About a quarter of an inch will do, regardless of paver type. This allows proper drainage and stone or brick setting.

# Chapter 8: Arbor and Pergola Backyard Landscaping

Pergolas and arbors are quaint additions that add character to any lawn. These outdoor ornaments are built from wood and may look complicated to construct, but can be accomplished easily with the right tools and attitude.

When built correctly, arbors and pergolas become akin to an extra room outside the home — a private and perfect little oasis to relax and enjoy your backyard landscaping, all under a decorative design staple.



## Arbor and Pergola Materials

The hardscaping materials required for your arbor and pergola will largely be determined by the number of final details you wish to put in. However, the primary materials for building a pergola or arbor are as follows:

- **Pressure-treated boards and beams**, the skeleton of these classic backyard hardscapes.
- **Galvanized screws**, for configuration.
- **Beam ties**, to connect rafters and central beams during construction.
- **Angle brackets**, to support and reinforce the standing strength of your arbor or pergola.
- **Concrete mix**, for a lasting structural foundation.
- **Paint or stain**, if desired.

## Tools for Building an Arbor or Pergola

Contrary to what their finished design might have you thinking, arbors and pergolas do not require a vast list of specialty tools and equipment:

- **Layout and measuring:** Industrial measuring tape, chalk or paint marking box, levelers, construction twine, carpenter's square, speed squares.
- **Construction:** Drill and bits, bulge head screwdriver and hex head screwdriver, pliers and clamps, circular saw, reciprocating saw, hammers, nails, nailers, snips.
- **General tools:** Ladder, hammers, table saw, nail gun and compressor, router, hand sanders, caulking gun, jigsaw.

## What to Know Before Building an Arbor or Pergola

Installing a pergola in your backyard adds distinct character and warmth to space. Remember to keep these points in mind to make installation and construction that much smoother.

1. **Pick the right site.** Flat, level surfaces requiring minimum excavation and manipulation are ideal. Don't make things harder on yourself.
2. **Have form match function.** The size and designs of these unique backyard hardscape additions should come down to what you intend to use them for — be that a merely decorative garden archway or an awning-like, complete coverage of an outdoor dining area.
3. **Wood types and treatments.** Know what wood type will hold up to your area's weather conditions. Consult with experts to get input on cuts, colors and treatments to make boards and beams last.
4. **Pick a proper coating.** Always finish your arbor or pergola with a protective coating. They'll be spending their lives outdoors, after all.
5. **Don't overcomplicate things.** Arbors and pergolas are like puzzles. Once you have all the pieces spread out before you, the goal is to put them together.

## Arbor or Pergola Tips and Tricks

So many homeowners cite these hardscape features as attractive additions they wish they could build in their yards. We're here to reiterate — you absolutely can!

To make the entire process of constructing your arbor or pergola the easiest it can be, consider the following insider tips.

1. Use a custom pergola kit. Yes, these exist. And while you'll pay a bit more upfront for a completed, pre-cut kit rather than selecting and trimming boards yourself, you will save time and likely ease your mind.
2. Detailing. Elegantly trim rafters by curving or shaping their edges. This adds fantastic — and often overlooked — character to these already charming outdoor additions.
3. Add decorations or lighting. From hanging flowers and sprawling vines to paint coatings and carved, decorative trim — all these details make arbors and pergolas knock-out yard features.

# Conclusion: The Benefits of Hardscaping for Your Home — and for You

There's no rush quite like accomplishing a home project you've set your mind to.

From the first, faintest tug of an idea to shopping for materials, acquiring tools, sketching a look and constructing a beginning design, you put more than time, sweat and money into your yard. You put yourself.

When it comes to the world of backyard hardscaping ideas, we hope this guide has inspired and informed on the numerous ways to begin your backyard beautification.

Big or small, landscaping facelifts to new, complete constructions of outdoor living additions, the benefits of hardscaping go beyond aesthetic appeal. These projects boost the look, feel and value of your home. They are diverse and decorative, customizable and classic. And they are more than always primed for success with the right planning, foresight and industry hardscaping tricks — plus a guide that helps you get there.

The reach of your imagination and the detailing of your design eye are the only limits of what you can do with a hardscaping project — now, and for years to come.



## About Nitterhouse Masonry Products: Premium Masonry in the Mid-Atlantic and Beyond

Nitterhouse Masonry Products has been your partner in hardscaping projects for over five generations.

We speak masonry. From architectural block and paver stones to a range of hardscaping and precast products, we make and manufacture the materials at the heart of a beautiful backyard.

Yet we also know behind every residential landscaping project is a real person, looking for real, actionable ways to enhance the place they call home. With dealerships and project partnerships running throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia and beyond, we want your backyard hardscapes to be everything they can be.

Find a [dealer or service provider near you](#). Or explore our wide selection of masonry and architectural collections or [installation guides](#). Product [information and service](#) requests are always a click away.

Cheers to making a house a home — and the yard your favorite place within it.

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