Expert Advice
10 SIMPLE STEPS to Create a Better Garden

Master Class
Design Ideas from Piet Oudolf

CREATE A HIDEAWAY with PRIVACY PLANTINGS

PLUS
+ Easy-care Annuals
+ Choosing the Right Stone
+ Bulbs for Winter Bloom
Walk This Way

Key considerations for designing a stone walkway that suits your garden’s style, climate and functions

words and photographs by Jan Johnson
Most of us see outdoor walks as a fairly straightforward affair. They connect point A to point B, acting as pedestrian links or connectors. But if you think about it, walks and paths also establish the rhythm of an outdoor space. They weave through a landscape and control the speed of our pace by their layout. Curving walks slow us down, while straight walks encourage us to move more rapidly.

The paving of a walk also affects our tempo. Walkways covered in loose gravel or small pebbles make us walk a little slower and focus on where we place our feet. We may even listen to the sound of the gravel underfoot. Conversely, we walk a little faster on hard, paved walks, because they offer a more solid footing and we feel more secure. The combination of a walk’s look, its materials and how it leads us through a space makes it a dynamic player in the landscape. I hope that what follows will leave you thinking of new ways to get from point A to point B.

FACES OF A STONE WALK
Most of our everyday walks are paved in a predictable pattern. But as we become aware of what is possible and see examples of innovative paving ideas, this is starting to change. Who says that stone paving has to be boring? The walks shown here illustrate some of the ways stone can be used to create an attractive walking surface and add some panache to a garden. These ideas can be used in any size landscape, large or small.

Most people make their front walk too narrow. This ends up looking like a cramped strip—a runway to a front door—suitable for only one person. When installing a walk, always err on the wide side. A front walk should be at least four feet wide. This creates direction and unmistakably tells guests to go “this way.” It also allows people to walk side by side, and plants can grow over the edges without making the walk less usable.

You can make the walk appear wider by leaving a generous shoulder on one or both sides. This means that the land is somewhat level with the walk before it slopes down or up. The extra bit of shoulder room makes the walk feel and look wider. Another tip: Make sure a front walk is at least 30 inches or more away from any walls so people don’t brush against a wall as they walk.

Wider walkways work well with larger homes and contemporary-style homes. It is not uncommon to make the front walk at least five or six feet wide in a modern setting, making the front yard seem more spacious. A wide entryway can provide room for planters that add some embellishment to the scene. The walk can be made wider with a border, called a “soldier row,” of stones, bricks or pavers.
Walks should be wide enough to accommodate outdoor equipment. For example, a lawn mower or garden cart requires about four feet, while a tractor may need five or six feet or more.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT STONE
Stone walks offer a wonderful opportunity to display stone paving to its best advantage. With a wide variety to choose from, you want to find the stone that complements your home and can withstand the climate where you live. Here are the three criteria you should consider:

Style: Irregular, rough stones look great with a country house, while the clean lines of smooth, cut stone are suitable for a modern home. Tawny-colored sandstone matches a desert home, and gray-blue bluestone adds character to a colonial style house.

Climate: Dense stone like granite and quartzite can withstand freezing temperatures, making it best for cold climates. More porous stones like limestone are better suited to warmer areas, as they absorb water, which could freeze and crack the stone. Ask your stone yard about a stone's freeze/thaw ratings.

STEPS FOR A STEPPING-STONE PATH INSPIRED BY JAPANESE GARDENS

- The size of a stone for 1 step is 12 inches wide.
- The size of a stone for 2 feet on the stone is about 24 inches wide.
- Use larger flat stones, 36 inches wide or more, near a house or structure. These act as landings and can be squared off in a more formal style.
- Mix rectangular stones and stones with rounded corners in longer runs to create interest. Also, change the sizes so that they are not all the same.
- Flat stones that are a circular shape can be placed in a long run of stepping stones to add a little punch.
- Space the small stepping stones to match the spacing of your normal footsteps—remember the ordinary right-left walking gait when you do this. Step on them in several practice runs before installing.
- The height of the stones should be set about two inches above ground. This can be altered at the discretion of the gardener.
- Stagger the arrangement with four stones in a line and then the next three stones set slightly to the side.
- For variation, mix medium-size rectangular stones staggered with small stones placed close together in between.
- Angle the stones slightly along the walk. Angling the stones creates interest.—JJ

Left: A looser arrangement of irregular stepping stones creates a casual look well suited to back yards and gardens, as opposed to front entryways.

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**SELECTING THE RIGHT STONE**

Consider all the details of any stone to see if it will work best in your garden, in terms of fulfilling the purpose of the walk and complementing the style and location of your garden. Here are seven common stone options and their key characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stone</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Where It Comes From</th>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona flagstone (sandstone)</td>
<td>sedimentary rock formed by layers of cemented sand and tiny rock grains</td>
<td>earthy, tawny look</td>
<td>quarried in Arizona (Ash Fork, Az., has claimed itself “The Flagstone Capital of the World”)</td>
<td>pastel pinks, buff gold, dark red, tan, brown, yellow, gray and white</td>
<td>cooler surface temperatures in summer; weather resistant; used in outdoor projects</td>
<td>porous and tends to be soft; should be sealed to avoid staining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granite</td>
<td>igneous rock</td>
<td>patterns with fine to coarse grains</td>
<td>Northeast and East Coast, Texas, South Dakota, Minnesota and other states</td>
<td>white, gray, yellow, mauve, pink, crimson and black</td>
<td>extremely hard surface; high resistance to scratching and acid; amenable to cutting and shaping; good for high-traffic areas</td>
<td>costly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartzite</td>
<td>hard, metamorphic rock</td>
<td>grainy, sandpaper-like surface that becomes glassy; very attractive</td>
<td>Oklahoma, Utah, South Dakota, Central Texas, Wisconsin, Appalachia</td>
<td>white, silver, yellow, gray, various shades of pink and red</td>
<td>resistant to weathering and chemicals; non-slip surface; resistant to stains</td>
<td>rough, textured surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluestone</td>
<td>blue-gray sandstone with quartz</td>
<td>flat with a rough texture; classical look, usually cut into rectangular and square shapes; thin</td>
<td>primarily Pennsylvania and New York</td>
<td>blue, gray, lilac and burgundy</td>
<td>dense, durable paving; non-slip surface; commonly used as outdoor paving; resistant to freeze-thaw cycles</td>
<td>requires proper sealing to resist chlorine or salt water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone</td>
<td>sedimentary rock composed of calcite</td>
<td>natural split surface; elegant</td>
<td>commonly found in Indiana</td>
<td>gray, beige, yellow and black</td>
<td>used outdoors for its aesthetic qualities and ability to be cut into various shapes and sizes; classic look</td>
<td>has high absorption—needs to be sealed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travertine</td>
<td>form of limestone</td>
<td>pitted holes and troughs in its surface; weathered look; it can be polished to a smooth, shiny finish</td>
<td>found naturally in Oklahoma and Texas</td>
<td>shades of brown, tan, white, cream, gray and coral-red</td>
<td>durable, higher-end stone; stays cool outdoors; used for patios and garden paths</td>
<td>will react to acidic liquids, which will result in dulling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basalt</td>
<td>igneous or volcanic rock</td>
<td>lightly textured and dark, with bold texture</td>
<td>commonly found in Montana and British Columbia</td>
<td>natural gray, beige or black</td>
<td>used in walls, columns, veneers, stairs, walks, patios</td>
<td>is a porous material and will stain; must seal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If a walk is to be bordered with plants, make it at least a foot wider than you think it should be, particularly if the plants are mounding in form. As they mature, they will crowd the walk and make it seem narrower, as this Japanese forest grass (Hakonechloa macra aurea) has done.

Function: For front walks where traffic is high, smooth, uniform stones that are set evenly on a concrete or gravel base are recommended. This lessens the probability of tripping and reduces maintenance. A simple stepping-stone path is better suited for gardens or back yards.

The slip resistance of a stone is also a consideration, particularly in areas where the walk is exposed to the elements. Smooth stone surfaces may become slippery when wet, so most quarries or stone yards will rough up the stone by applying different surface finishes. These give the stone some grip or texture and range from a bush-hammered or brushed finish to a thermal finish and others. Always ask about the possible surface treatments available.

CATEGORIES OF STONE FOR PAVING

Paving stone can be either natural or quarried. There are several general categories of stone for paving. These are fieldstone, flagstone or cut stone. Fieldstone is any uncut stone that is indigenous to an area. It is not quarried. You usually use fieldstone the way it is found, with a minimum of shaping. It is used in settings where a natural stone look is desired.

Flagstone is sedimentary stone that is quarried, has a relatively smooth surface and can be split into thin slabs, or flags. Available in a range of colors, shapes and sizes, flagstone provides a good surface to walk on. The flagstone quarried in Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut is a durable choice known as bluestone. In Colorado, a popular flagstone is Colorado Buff. In the Southwest, Arizona flagstone, a form of sandstone, is widely used for walks and patios.

Cut stone is any type of stone cut to a dimensional shape. It may be formed into thin pieces or thicker blocks. It is cut to a desired shape during either the quarrying process or installation, and it is quite durable.

The table on the facing page lists common stone types used in landscaping, their characteristics and their typical landscape uses.

Designer and author Jan Johnson was introduced to the sublime beauty of natural stone in the landscape as a young professional living in Kyoto, Japan, and working for a landscape architecture firm. She has been active in horticulture and landscape design for over 40 years.

THE SPIRIT OF STONE

This text and its accompanying images were excerpted from Jan Johnson's fourth book, The Spirit of Stone (©2017 St. Lynn's Press). Reprinted with permission from St. Lynn's Press. Learn more at The Spirit of Stone on Facebook (facebook.com/thespiritofstone) and at Jan's blog, Serenity in the Garden (serenityinthegarden.blogspot.com).