

Walking Down a Garden Path

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Garden paths provide visitors to our gardens a view of different areas of the garden by leading them from one section to another. Every path should have a destination, whether it is a gate, work area, sitting area or view. Paths can be straight, for a formal look, or curvy, for a relaxed, easy-going garden. In fact, many garden magazines recommend curved lines to a path which might hold an element of surprise just around the corner!

The width of a path is determined by its use. Will it need to accommodate a lawn mower? Do you want to stroll on the path with another person by your side? Is there a need for it to be accessible for a wheelchair or walker? Or will it wind discreetly through a garden and serve only as walking path? For the latter, the path need only be two feet wide, but for other needs it should be three feet to five feet in width.

Paths can be made of many different types of materials. Concrete, pavers, bricks, and flagstone are just a few of the many materials on the market that form a solid footing. Using these materials creates more of a formal look to a garden path, whether curvy or straight. Materials such as pea gravel, decomposed granite (DG), bark chips and stepping stones with plants in between are used for a more casual garden. Some gardens may have a combination of all of the above mentioned materials, depending on use and area in the garden.

To edge or not to edge? That can be a perplexing question to some gardeners. More formal garden paths are edged with brick, bender board or timbers, while the relaxed garden might use river rocks or allow plants to spill onto the walkway, obscuring the edge of the path.

Here are two informal paths that anyone can do. The first is an easy gravel path:

- Step 1. Dig out the defined path area to a depth of 3-4 inches below garden grade.
- Step 2. Cover the path with a soil-separating fabric...one that allows water to seep through. (Do not use plastic.) Hold the fabric down with large metal staples.
- Step 3. Cover the cloth with 3-4 inches of pea gravel. (Crushed gravel is more stable than the rounded pea gravel.)
- Step 4. (Optional, if using pea gravel). For better foot support, position broad, flat stepping stones in the field of gravel.
- Step 5. Edge the path with small river rocks or let plants spill over the edge.

Weeds won't grow in this 2nd simple path; however it does require more supplies.

- Step 1. Dig out the defined path area to a depth of 2 inches below garden grade.
- Step 2. Pour dry concrete mix directly from the bag into the path. Rake the concrete mix evenly until it forms a 2 inch layer.
- Step 3. With a 2 ft. length of a 2x4, level the concrete mix and smooth the surface using a side to side motion.

Step 4. Using a garden hose with the nozzle set for fine misting, moisten the concrete mix gently, but thoroughly, until water begins to puddle on the surface.

Step 5. While the concrete is still wet, sprinkle all-purpose sand until it covers the surface lightly, like powdered sugar on a pancake. Allow the concrete to harden for 12-24 hours. After the concrete is dry, sprinkle on loose sand if you want a thicker coating. Add more sand each year after winter rains.

Once done you will definitely enjoy your walk down these garden paths.

Carolee James has created both of these paths in her garden. Well, actually her husband created them, while Carolee supervised!