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## REAL ESTATE

### ASK THE BUILDER

Tim Carter

# An Enduring Look for an Enduring Patio

**Q** DEAR TIM: I have decided to use patio pavers to build a nice outdoor space. Installing them seems easy enough, but I don't want to make a mistake. Can you tell me how to install them? What should I be concerned about if I want a patio that looks good and is as low-maintenance as possible?

— Kay H., Rochester, N.Y.

**A** DEAR KAY: Just before I was married, I got my first taste of patios made with paver brick. My future mother-in-law wanted a red brick patio and found some used paving bricks for the job. I installed them using some common sense and lots of luck and sweat. The full-size bricks were set on a compacted base of dry sand mixed with cement. Believe it or not, today that patio looks as it did the day I finished it, and that was 35 years ago.

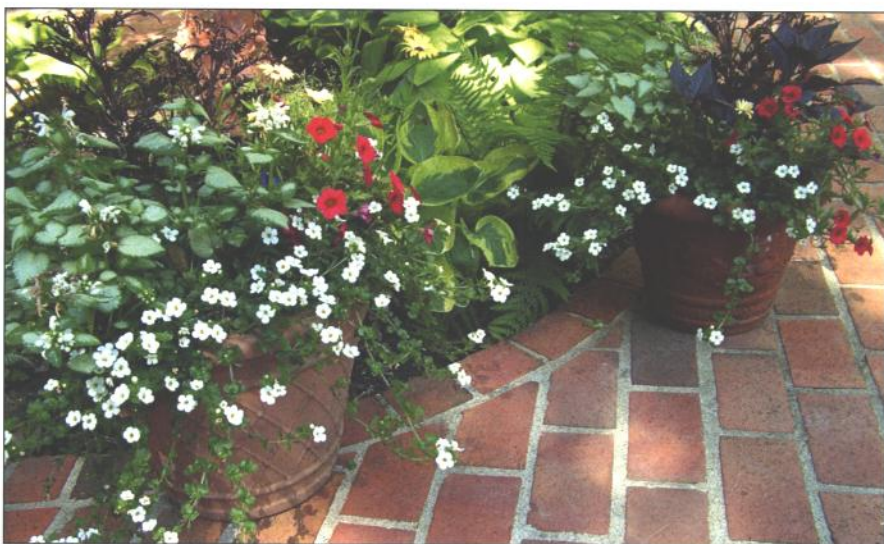
Since then, the concrete industry has gotten involved in the patio business. Colored concrete interlocking paving brick became quite popular, but I feel that the mortarless concrete products do not have the same character as real paving brick made from clay. When you go the next step and use mortar, you have a classic look.

However, building a traditional brick patio takes skill and time. I know — my wife had me do this on the patio and front sidewalk at two homes.

The first time I did a paving-brick job at my home, I tried a new method of setting the brick in sand. It was a dismal failure. Weeds grew between the bricks, and whenever it rained, the water would bring sand to the surface from between the small cracks. This sand got tracked inside our home, making a mess. When the moles showed up and pushed up the brick, that was the final straw.

I tore up that sidewalk and taught myself how to install patio pavers over concrete. The sidewalk and patio I did at my second home are still in fantastic shape.

I recommend that you talk with friends and see if any have patios that have been down for 20 years or longer. See what the patios look like after Mother Nature has had her way. One of the things I do not like about the colored concrete paver patios is that they can fade. The pigmented cement paste wears off the sand and gravel in the concrete, fading the color. The true color of the aggregate in the concrete comes out.



BY TIM CARTER — TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

**This patio was built with pavers. They could have been set in sand, but laying them in mortar creates a timeless feel.**

This is but one reason I prefer traditional clay-brick pavers. The color never fades because the clay is the same color through the entire brick. When you buy paver bricks that have been fired to resist weather, the color is locked in and will not change. The clay in the brick becomes like rock, and weather and oxidation seem to have no effect on its appearance.

To achieve a traditional look for your patio that is mole-proof and will not produce loose sand, mortar the brick to a concrete slab. This process is time-consuming and expensive, but it can last decades with no maintenance other than an annual cleaning to remove dirt and algae.

Remember: Any new patio will look good at first. You need to consider what the patio will look like in 10, 15, even 25 years. Invest in a surface that will have a rich and traditional appeal and require virtually no work once it is installed. That is what I have at my home, and you could never persuade me to install anything other than traditional clay paving brick.

*Tim Carter can be contacted via his Web site, [www.askthebuilder.com/printer\\_Submit\\_Question.shtml](http://www.askthebuilder.com/printer_Submit_Question.shtml).*

## Master the Basics

Installing any hard patio surface will be lots of hard work, but tiny excavating machines can allow you to dig with ease. Visit a tool rental store to see what kind of machinery it has that can help you do the work with minimal effort.

If you decide to pour a concrete slab that will serve as the foundation for your patio, be sure that the concrete is at least four inches thick and has steel rods in it. The steel minimizes cracks and holds the concrete together in one giant piece. The rods need to be in the center of the concrete and spaced two feet on center in both directions, or two feet between the center of one rod and the center of the next.

Slope the patio away from your house. The slope should be about one-eighth of an inch per foot. This slight slope will make the patio appear level but ensure that water readily flows out into the yard.

Before you pour the concrete, think about underground utilities. Now is the time to run conduit or new downspout drain lines.