

A Little Stone Makes a Big Impact

Hardscaping projects don't need to be huge to make a huge difference to your overall landscape.

By Lou Sullivan

Limited space does not mean limited options when it comes to transforming your outdoor surroundings into a stone sanctuary. There are numerous inventive and attractive ways of adding hardscaping accents to your property without requiring large areas or even a thick wallet.

From a rustic stacked wall, a cleverly designed patio, a cobblestone apron alongside the driveway, to more high-budget items such as a built-in gas fire pit with remote control, there are infinite options to enhance your property that can pay dividends.

A good first impression

"First of all, it adds to your curb appeal, which is what people are always trying to do if they want to sell their home," says Gary Murphy, owner of Coy's Brook Landscaping. "It's that first impression. If it's a good one, everything seems to fall positively after that."

Thus, a crushed stone driveway can be set apart by a cobblestone apron, and a concrete stoop can be replaced with striking granite steps. "It's also nice to add outdoor lighting that accents the hardscaping and pulls people in," says Craig Whitten, owner of Whitten Landscaping.

Incorporating hardscape ideas into your front entrance design with a walkway of flagstone or brick enhances the visual appeal by blending texture and pattern into the landscaping. Over time, grass and flowers will grow up so that your walkway appears to have always been there.

Walkways can also serve as routes to other areas of the yard without having to step in mud or walk across the grass. If your front entrance is elevated, a retaining wall is a functional, attractive way to spruce up the property. Brick, slate, or other stone materials can be utilized to create various patterns and designs.

Firming up outdoor living spaces

But hardscaping isn't only about attracting potential buyers to your home; it's also about designing areas that are pleasing to the eye and create a comfortable outdoor space for relaxing and entertaining.

Professionals recommend that homeowners consider the entire area available for hardscaping before embarking on a project, even if only one space is being considered at the time. Failing to evaluate the entire site is like building one room to a house without thinking about the remainder of the layout. Creating a patio now might seem like a good idea, but what if you decide later that you want a barbecue, a pond or a walkway and the patio is in the way?

It's also important to decide if you want your hardscape to be casual or elegant. Whichever option you choose, a well-defined style is more attractive than a hodgepodge of designs.

A popular trend when working with a small space is to create a cozy patio using pavers, bricks or random pieces of stone. "Put in two chairs and a small table and you have a nice little area to sit and have a cup of coffee," Murphy says.

Adding small touches to bigger spaces

Larger patios can be enhanced with sitting walls that accent the edges of the space and provide additional seating. In days gone by, a traditional patio would

usually require outdoor furniture, and people would place plants around the space for visual effect. "Now we're building small, shaped or curved sitting walls where people can sit and have a drink while waiting for their food to cook on the grille," Murphy says.

Walls can be made of a mixture of man-made and natural stones. "A natural fieldstone base with a bluestone top is a nice contrast," Whitten says.

Cobblestone aprons along driveways remain a popular option, but there is lots of buzz right now with fire pits. Although fire pits can be quite elaborate and pricey, those on a tight budget need not be left out in the cold. Inexpensive kits are available, allowing a fire pit to be constructed with little expense or effort. "We just install some stone, use interlocking concrete pavers, level the area and put sand in the middle," Murphy says. "People can then build a little campfire, even cook on it if they want."



This stacked stone wall, created by Mike Stacy Landscaping, offers a focal point and delineates various spaces.



These wide, shallow steps, created by Whitten Landscaping, give a rolling backyard definition.

Landscaping Accents

Whitten points out that man-made pavers are reasonably priced. Costs rise once homeowners begin selecting stones such as bluestone, travertine and fieldstone.

Another way to add flavor to hardscaping is by incorporating a design or pattern into the stone driveway, wall or patio. It could be a compass, a star, a name or a motif – anything that creates an added dimension to the space. Mixing different stones and colors also produces a stunning visual. “There are many different ways to give the area some character,” Whitten says.

Although hardscapes can initially be more costly than installing a wood deck, experts point out that stone lasts forever and requires little maintenance.

“The wood on Cape Cod tends to last eight to 15 years,” Whitten says. “Stone is timeless. That’s the beauty of it.” •



Photo courtesy of Veterino's Landscape and Irrigation

A cobblestone border was used by Veterino's Landscape and Irrigation to dress up this brick driveway.