



Constructing a backyard PATIO

Adding a patio to your backyard can provide livable outdoor space and return more than half of its cost in increased value of your home.

There are some particulars to know about hiring a pro to install hardscaping. Do your homework first to be sure you'll end up with a result that will provide years of use and enjoyment.

Types of patios

There are a wide range of materials you can choose from for your patio. Which one you choose depends on the style aesthetic you'd like to achieve, durability and the amount of maintenance you will need to perform.

Pavers. Pavers are the most affordable option for a patio, though costs can really ramp up with a wide selection of premium materials available. Pavers can be customized with a design of contrasting colors and shapes. Every two to five years, the sand in the joints of a paver patios should be refreshed. Depending on the type of sand used, this might include removing the existing sand, or simply adding more sand. If the pavers are sealed, they also will need to be resealed.

Concrete. Concrete is a popular, versatile and affordable option for your patio. You can customize your design by having the concrete stamped, brushed, colored or tinted, though expect to pay more for these options. Concrete needs to be resealed every few years, which is inexpensive and easy to do.

Natural stone. Flagstone, which includes materials such as sandstone, limestone, bluestone, travertine, slate and quartzite are

popular — but pricey — options in this category. Sometimes they are arranged on pea gravel or crushed stone for a more natural look. Natural stone can be cleaned with specialized liquids. It may stain, in which case you can use an outdoor bleach or muriatic acid formulation. Because flagstone is typically installed in large pieces, you will likely be able to replace a piece if it gets damaged.

Other materials. Some other popular patio materials among eco-conscious homeowners include recycled rubber paving stones or bricks, recycled plastic and open concrete grids with grass growing between pieces of concrete.

Choosing a contractor

When choosing a contractor to complete your patio project, conduct the same due diligence you would perform with any home project. Ask friends and family for recommendations on pros they've used. Get quotes and interview at least three contractors. Be sure the contractor you choose is licensed and insured. Ask for references, and if possible, take a look at previous projects the contractor has completed.

When you compare quotes, be sure to compare apples to apples. Look at the thickness of the material being used and the depth of the base (a good, compacted base is essential to the project's longevity).

Ask if the contractor will repair any lawn damage that might be incurred by large equipment used during the project. Be sure to agree on cleanup requirements and a payment schedule before the project starts.