



A16 Building a garden path



Paths should offer year round access to your growing areas as well as garden features like sheds. They needn't be complicated or expensive, but should be well built for safety and durability. The following instructions illustrate how to make simple paths from grass, bark chip, gravel and paving.

Resources

- Tools including: spade, fork, shovel, wheelbarrow, soil rake, spirit level, garden line and canes
- Path surface materials (see below)
- Garden design showing the location of paths (see B4.3 for example plan)

Activity

- 1 Using the garden design as a guide, mark out the location and shape of the paths with garden line and canes.
- 2 Follow detailed instruction on the next page as required
 - a Building a grass path
 - b Building a bark chip or gravel path
 - c Building a paved path

Extended activities

- 1 Prepare growing areas between paths (see B4.8 and B5.8).
- 2 Organise a 'path-making day' by inviting pupils, parents and local people to help clear the space. See A1 and A2 for ideas.

Health & Safety

Choose a surface that allows safe access for all users. If unsure about the construction method, consult a builder. Follow Manual Handling guidance when moving bulky materials like gravel (B3.4). Be careful when using old kitchen knives to cut turf edges, ensuring adult supervision.

See also Health and Safety Guidelines (Section B3.3)

Further information

A1 Hosting an annual event
A2 Organising a gardening day
B4.8 Removing weeds and grass
B4.10 Making paths and surfaces
B5.8 Digging

Instructions for building a garden path

a Building a grass path

Grass paths can be made when digging out new beds in an existing lawn. When the bed is prepared, simply cut the lawn edge with a spade or 'half-moon' tool to define the path shape, using a wooden board or hosepipe for guidance if helpful.



Preparing the ground for new grass

1 Clear the area of weeds and any existing lawn in poor condition, eg weak growth, patchy, very mossy, etc. See A14. If the soil is very hard and compacted, dig the soil adding organic matter if required (see A9). A depth of 10-15cm is usually deep enough.



2 Roughly level the soil using a fork, then walk slowly up and down the area with small footsteps to firm down the soil. Next rake the soil level to create an even surface ready for turves or grass seed.



Laying turf

- 1** Unroll the turf on the soil, tapping it down with your hands so the grass roots are in contact with the soil beneath.
- 2** Place a wooden board on the laid turf and walk across this to spread your weight evenly.
- 3** Still standing on this board, lay the next turf alongside, staggering the joints, and 'butting' each turf tightly up against the next. Any gaps will otherwise dry out and go brown. Use an old kitchen knife to cut lawn edges as required.
- 4** Water thoroughly after planting and then once or twice a week in hot weather until established.

Sowing grass seed

Top tip



Seasonal timing

Laying turf and sowing seed is best done in autumn or spring when the warm and wet weather helps grass establish.

- 1 Use a 'stale seedbed' method before sowing, ie prepare the ground and then leave it for a couple of weeks until weed seedlings germinate. Hoe these off and sow without further disturbing the ground.



- 2 Using twine or bamboo canes mark out the area into one metre squares.



- 3 Measure out sufficient seed for the sowing area (follow instructions on the seed packet). Divide the seed in two amounts. Using the metre squares as a guide, sprinkle the first half evenly over the soil in one direction and then sow the second batch at right angles to this.



- 4 Lightly rake in. Water after planting and then once or twice a week in hot weather until established.



b Building a bark chip or gravel path

Top tip



Adding durability to bark and gravel paths

In areas of high pedestrian traffic, dig a deeper trench (10-20cm) and compact a 5-10cm layer of 'hardcore' at the bottom

- 1 Once the path is marked out on the soil, roughly clear the area of weeds or grass (see B4.8).
- 2 Dig out the soil to a depth of 5-10cm to create a shallow trench. If free of weed roots, transfer the excavated topsoil into adjacent growing areas.
- 3 Compact the soil surface at the bottom of the trench by stamping on the soil evenly across the whole length. Rake or scrape level with a spade as required.
- 4 Lay a water-permeable and weed suppressing membrane fabric across the bottom of the trench, pushing into the sides and cutting to size.
- 5 Spread a 5-10cm deep layer of gravel (eg 2cm grade) or bark chips and rake level



c Building a paved path

Top tip



Getting advice

If unsure about the construction method, consult a builder or landscaping firm.

- 1 Once the path is marked out on the soil, roughly clear the area of weeds and grass (see B4.8).
- 2 Dig down to firm sub-soil or around 10-20cm. If free of weed roots, transfer the excavated topsoil into growing areas.
- 3 Compact a 5-10cm layer of 'hardcore' (crushed rock) to create a level surface. Hardcore and compacting machines are available from builder's merchants. Add a 2.5-5cm layer of sand and compact again.
- 4 Lay strips or blobs of mortar (made by mixing water with one part cement and five parts sharp sand).
- 5 Position the paving (eg brick, new or reclaimed paving slabs) on the mortar and tamp down, using a spirit level to check the level. Continue as required. Leave two days before walking on.
- 6 If preferred, use 'spacers' between paving for 1cm gaps, but remove before the mortar sets. Fill the space between paving with a stiff mix of mortar, filling to just between the paved surface, and then brushing the paving clean.



Different paved surfaces