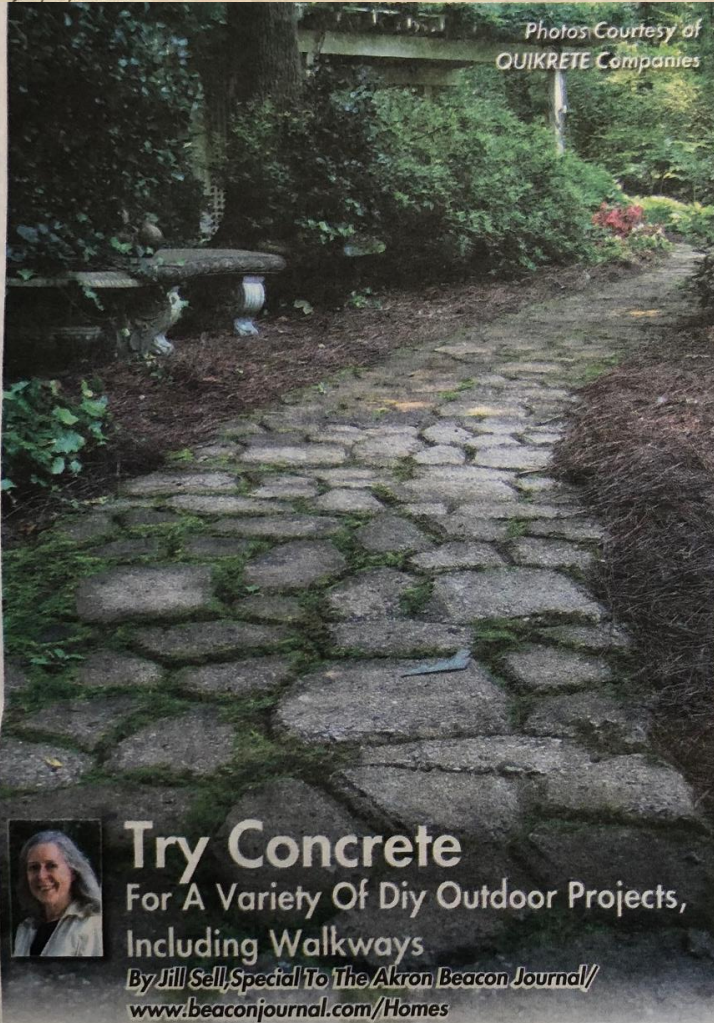


Homes & Living

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Photos Courtesy of
QUIKRETE Companies



Try Concrete For A Variety Of Diy Outdoor Projects, Including Walkways

By Jill Sell, Special To The Akron Beacon Journal/
www.beaconjournal.com/Homes

No one expects you to spend this July 4th weekend working in your yard. But in between the barbecue, the watermelon, the flag flying and the sparklers, you might want to consider an outdoor home improvement project. That can be just as fun in a different kind of way.

Consider concrete. It is one of the most versatile materials that can be used to create your ideas. It is relatively inexpensive, durable and many projects can be tackled successfully by first-time DIYers. Concrete can be

colored, stained, stamped, etched or coated. The world is built on concrete – each year 2 billion tons of concrete is produced globally and is used to make everything from skyscrapers to small candle holders. But basically all you need is some bags of pre-mixed concrete mix and you are good to go.

Projects are endless: planters and flower pots from itty bitty to big enough to hold shrubs and small trees; bird baths; picnic tables and benches; fountains; address numbers, fire pits; reflecting ponds; and decorative

garden balls. And of course there are also the practical tasks including steps, flagpoles, mailboxes, fence posts, retaining walls and more.

How about a new path? Concrete walkways can be a good solution for homeowners tired of slipping on muddy paths or wet grass, or who just want to add an interesting element to their landscape. While bricks, pavers, gravel, mulch, flagstone and other materials have their place, concrete is also a viable option. Using plastic forms that are available in a number of styles (think red brick patterns or a country stone look), a homeowner can do a section of the pathway at a time. So when it's time to just relax on the back deck, you can stop at a convenient time and finish later.

The QUIKRETE Companies (you have seen their familiar yellow bags of concrete products in home improvement stores) celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, having been founded in Columbus, Ohio. Modified instructions for building a pathway with QUIKRETE Walkmaker (a reusable form is 2 foot by 2 foot and uses one 80-pound bag of concrete), are below. Video instructions are available at www.quikrete.com.

Step 1: Remove sod and soil to desired width, shape and length of the path, keeping it level.

Step 2: Mix concrete and water in wheelbarrow or tub.

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Step 3: Lay form at the beginning of the path and fill with concrete mix; smooth surface with a trowel.

Step 4: Remove the form; smooth edges of path with trowel before the concrete mix hardens. Brush the surface with a stiff broom for a nonslip finish.

Step 5: Continue to place the form against the completed section of the path. Fill in with concrete mix, remove the form and smooth the surface. Repeat until the path is complete.

Step 6: For a curved walkway, remove the form from the freshly poured section of the path and reposition it in the direction of the curve. Press down to slice off the corner. Use a trowel to consolidate and smooth cut-off edges.

Step 7: New cement should be water cured with a fine mist spray for three to five days, or apply Acrylic Cure and Seal.

One way to really personalize all or parts of the walkway is to press in leaf prints, small stones, shells or other items before the mix is solid. Also, discreet handprints of your kids and the project date can always be incorporated because those are things that help make a house become a home.

Of course some concrete walkways require more than just a long weekend to complete. Professionals are usually needed for larger, more complicated plans. Brian Pittman is owner of Aura Concrete and Landscaping in Canal

Fulton, serving Summit, Medina and Stark Counties. Pittman believes a successful outdoor living space begins with a good design and that walkways can be part of that plan.

"Pathways don't exist for any other reason except to get to somewhere else," said Pittman. "No one just does a pathway to nowhere."

True, but that pathway doesn't have to lead to a major destination including a swimming pool or gazebo. Paths can lead around a garage to a compost bin, to a sundial in an herb or flower bed, or through a veggie garden. Those are the kind of walkways that are particularly manageable for DIYers.

"There are a lot of patterns and textures from which to choose, some that mimic stones or pavers and that look natural," said Pittman. "You can also have almost any color you want because of the mixes. But we try to stay with the earth tones. There are a lot of advantage to using concrete. It has its place in our world for landscaping and hardscapes."



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