



Hack a Small Patio

You can easily create a beautiful garden space for relaxing and entertaining without breaking your budget by using reclaimed material and a bit of creativity.

BY SHAWNA CORONADO

HACKING IS the concept of breaking traditional rules to discover a creative way to accomplish something—a clever trick that saves cash for the thrifty or solves a problem elegantly. Whether the hack is for gardening, computing, cooking, or anything in between, “hacking” your way through daily challenges is fast becoming a new lifestyle choice because the best hacks are easy, smart, and they save us money.

My garden has always been a hotbed for green and organic garden hacks. With a limited budget, I am constantly on the lookout for alternative ways to build a useful, beautiful, low-cost, and low-input garden. Here I offer a couple of hacks I’ve discovered for creating a lovely patio area with reclaimed sand, bricks, and stones.



BUILD A “FLOATING” PATIO

WHEN YOUR property is filled with tree roots or rocky areas that make adding garden structures difficult, hacking an environmentally-friendly solution is easy: simply float a patio or a fun, ground-level art accent right on top of the obstructions.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Shovel
- Thick landscaping fabric
- Sand or paving base
- Flat items including bricks, pavers, steppingstones, broken cement, rocks, log cuts, flagstone, non-hazardous construction materials, metal
- Pea gravel, lime screenings, or granite

STEP BY STEP

1. Mark off your building area shape and design on the ground. The area should be flat and relatively level.
2. Do your best to dig a 6- to 8-inch trench around the outside of your project area. This will allow standing water to drain off the area. This does not have to be perfect and can just involve several drain holes, but it allows for water to run off.
3. Cover the project area with a permeable cloth cover of some kind that will allow water to drain but will prevent worms from coming through and mixing the rock base. Landscape fabric or weed barrier is the logical choice for most installations.

continued on next page



This article is adapted from **101 Organic Gardening Hacks** by Shawna Coronado, Cool Springs Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2016. Used with permission of the publisher.



Mark the perimeter of a flat area for your patio, dig drainage holes, and cover with a permeable cloth cover such as landscape fabric.



Using flat, recycled materials from construction sites, such as bricks and broken cement, create a pattern on the ground.



Adjust and readjust the pattern as necessary until the design is to your liking.

4. Arrange reclaimed material of all types in an attractive pattern on top of the fabric.
5. Fill between the arranged material with a base of sand and rough gravel to help steady the reclaimed materials. Hardware and big box stores often have discounted broken bags.
6. Pour pea gravel over the top. For a firmer surface that can be used as a patio, use lime screenings or crushed granite that can be tamped down.




Cover the materials with a layer of sand and rough gravel. Top with pea gravel, lime screenings, or crushed granite.



HACK A GROUNDCOVER PATIO

THE EXPENSE OF building or rebuilding a patio can be quite high. If you'd like to add a patio or expand upon an existing construction, hack the project. There are plenty of free or very inexpensive materials that you can combine with groundcover to create a functional and natural outdoor living area. Pavers, patio blocks, stepping stones, or bricks are cheap and sometimes free, and they blend well with low-growing plants in a patio area. This can be non-permanent, dependent upon your needs. Having plants beneath your feet while entertaining is such a green delight. Best yet, you can grow low-maintenance, drought-tolerant groundcover plants such as hen-and-chicks (*Sempervivum* spp.), sedums, and thyme in order to save yourself money and time.

In the photo, you can see how concrete pavers were used (approximately 57 pounds each). Square patio blocks and pavers typically range from 12 inches to 24 inches in length and width. Measure the area you would like to fill with a groundcover patio, then leave three inches to four inches between pavers to accommodate your plants. Avoid gaps any wider than that because it will encourage more weeds to fill in that space. 

Shawna Coronado is an author, photographer, blogger, and green-lifestyle advocate who lives in Warrenville, Illinois.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Concrete pavers, bricks, stepping stones, or tiles
- Drought-tolerant soil mix (see below)
- Organic fertilizer
- Sand for leveling
- Shovel
- Rake
- Level
- Drought-tolerant groundcover plants

STEP BY STEP

1. Remove all grass or plants from the building area.
2. Amend soil with plenty of rich compost for drought conditions, leveling with more soil, and raking the area flat. (A good water-retentive soil mix hack is 1 part organic potting mix with worm castings, 1 part organic composted manure, and 1 part plain compost.)
3. Mark the area for block placement based on your measurements.
4. Place a 2-inch layer of sand over the area and level again carefully.
5. Place pavers in position, carefully maneuvering into your chosen pattern. (Geometric designs work best for groundcover-filled patios so that the straight lines enable the plants to spread and connect.)
6. Mix the remaining drought-tolerant soil with organic fertilizer and fill the areas between bricks with the fertilized soil.
7. Plant the plants, then water well and wait for your plants to grow in.