



Trail Mix

GARDEN PATHS ALLOW LANDSCAPES TO BE ENJOYED FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Ralph Waldo Emerson once mused that the qualifications for taking a walk include “an eye for nature” and “vast curiosity.” For many homeowners, there is no better way to enjoy the simple pleasures of the outdoors than by strolling through their own yards.

To get the latest scoop on garden paths and learn what needs to be considered when planning them, we spoke to Michael Dollin of Urban Earth Design, LLC; Misty Hancock of Marvel Building & Masonry Supply Inc.; César Mazier of César Mazier Landscaping & Consulting Inc.; and Chad Robert of Exteriors by Chad Robert Inc.

“A pathway in a garden is like a hallway in a house,” explains landscape architect Chad Robert. Here, a gravel walkway is flanked by colorful blooming plants and leads the way to a piece of sculpture.

FIRST STEPS

According to Dollin, paths allow people to connect to their landscapes and experience the outdoors in a natural way. “You’re getting back to the land in your own backyard,” he says, explaining that walkways are an extension of the renewed trend toward cocooning and enjoying the benefits of home. Here are some planning tips:

■ **Choose a concept.** Robert highlights the importance of identifying a theme for the area surrounding a footpath before planning the logistics. “Ask yourself, ‘What is the experience of this pathway?’” the landscape architect suggests. He outlines a few



Clockwise from above: Exposed aggregate was used for this entry path. Low-growing hardy succulents were planted between the steps, which are bordered by desert flora.

- Earth-colored stabilized granite was chosen for this trail because of its natural appearance. A pot and plantings of cacti add visual interest.

- Random-sized steppingstones placed in this grassy area create a path to draw people off the main walkway without disrupting the lawn.



popular concepts: a visual contrast created with colorful vegetation; a sensory experience using plantings such as lavender and rosemary; or a layout geared toward attracting wildlife. Butterflies and hummingbirds are relatively easy to draw to a Southwest garden, Robert states; try such plants as *Salvia greggii* and butterfly bush.

- **Deciding a route.** Regardless of their size, landscapes often have unused space that is ideal for pathways. Mazier recommends walking a property to look for eye-catching vegetation, spots that would accommodate groupings of plants, or appealing views (perhaps of the home from an unusual angle or

of a nearby mountain). He notes that trails should meander and curve, wind around plants, and loop so there is no end point.

- **Light the way.** Our experts agree that low-voltage lighting is an essential part of a successful design and should be included in the initial plan. Robert says that pathway lighting can be overwhelming and create a runway effect. Instead, use spotlights to illuminate a grade change, obstacle or steps, or install fixtures in trees for diffused ambient lighting similar to moonlight coming through branches. Dollin recommends tinted lights such as blues and purples for pops of color.

DESIGNING A ROUTE

- When designing a footpath, “plan the experience based on what you have,” advises Michael Dollin. For example, to accentuate a view from your backyard, devise a “narrative” trail in which a striking plant placed along the path will catch the eye and draw it to the view beyond.

- To determine the width of a walkway, take into account how it will be used, suggests César Mazier. Make a path 4 to 5 feet wide to accommodate two adults walking side-by-side; 3 feet should be wide enough for one person.

- If you decide to use steppingstones, consider planting low-growing drought-tolerant plants between the stones for visual interest, states Chad Robert. He mentions woolly thyme and oregano as potential ground covers.

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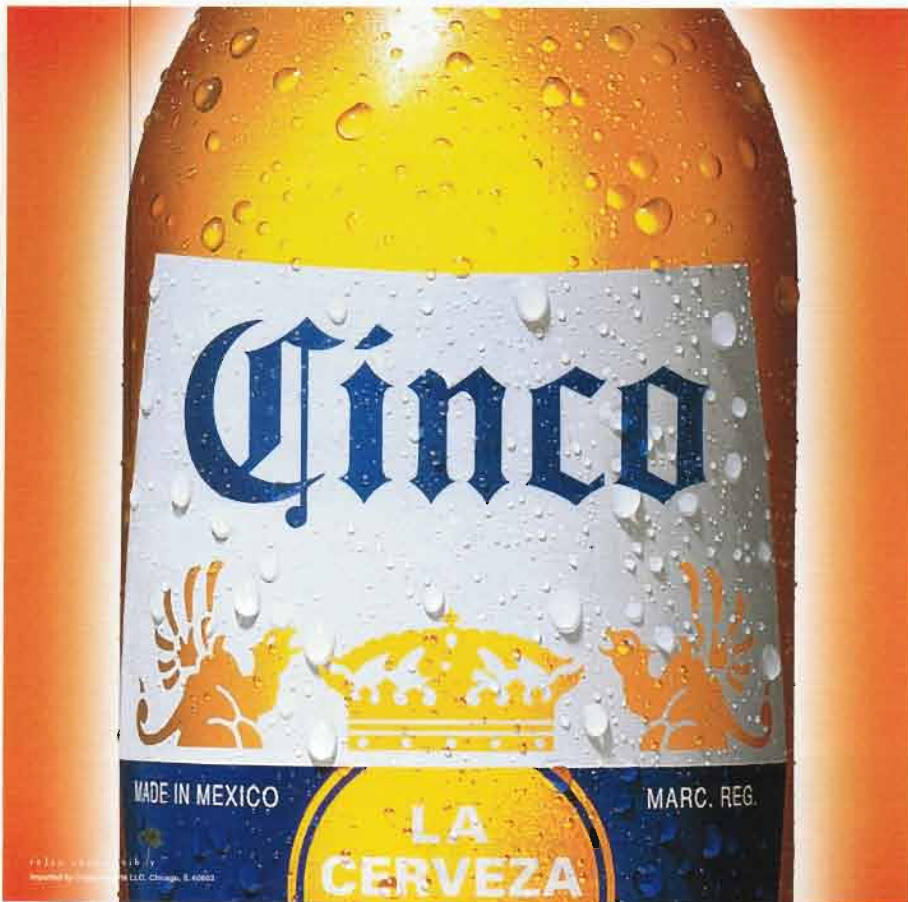
LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Hancock explains that a wide array of materials is available for pathways, including brick, natural stone and concrete. She points out the importance of considering how a walkway will be used and selecting a medium that tolerates the low desert's summer heat. Also keep in mind the color, texture and shape of the material. Here are some examples:

■ **Permeable options.** "There has been a big move to permeable paving," says Robert. In addition to reducing runoff, these absorbent materials allow irrigation and rainwater to recharge ground water. Stabilized granite is a permeable material recommended by several of our experts. Mazier likes it for its natural look, easy application and upkeep, compatibility with plants and relatively low cost. Rocks measuring one-quarter of an inch or smaller are mixed with a stabilizer and pressed into the ground to form a path. Depending on usage and



Trails can be formed using a variety of eco-friendly materials, including (top to bottom): a permeable paver; a permeable paving emulsion mixed with an aggregate; and a paver with spaces in-between that allow water to be absorbed into the soil below.





Decomposed granite and brick laid in a basket-weave pattern produce a distinct and permeable path. Golden barrel cacti planted in numerically ascending groups add to the visual appeal of the Contemporary design.

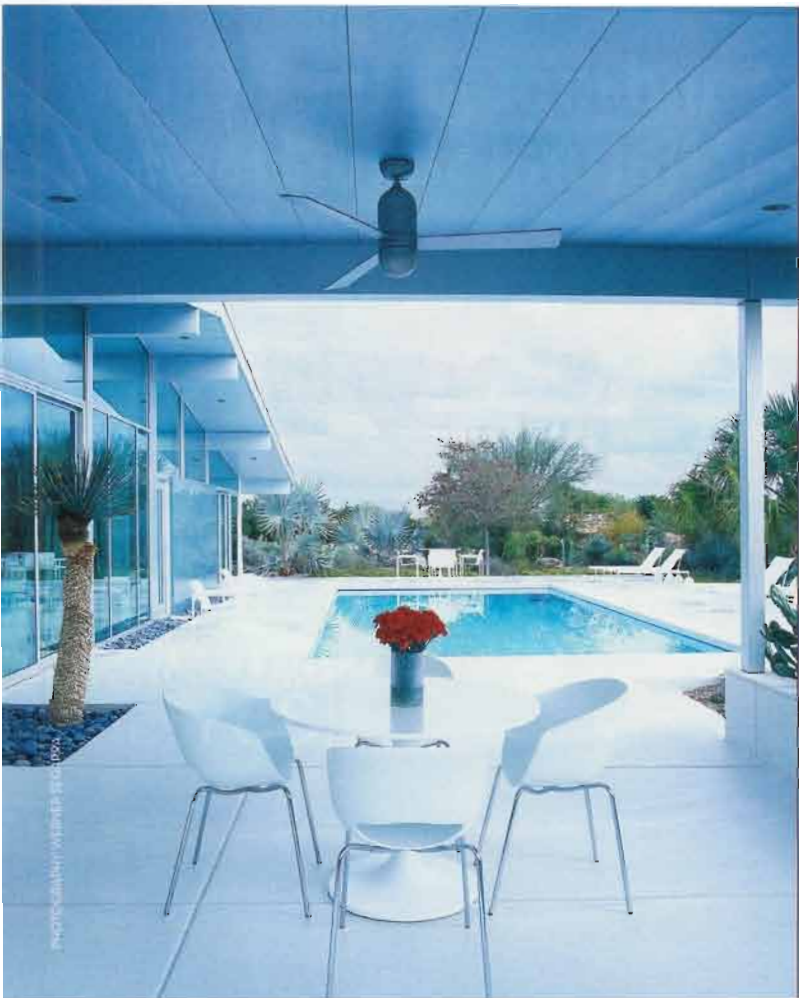
weather, stabilized granite can last up to five years before resurfacing is needed, he notes.

Materials that do not butt against each other also can be used to form permeable paths. Hancock likes Belgard's Aqua-Bric, a permeable paver with an interlocking design that helps reduce runoff.

■ **Green options.** Hancock states that Level 5 Group's line of environmental materials is ideal for paths. She describes the company's EkoPaver as a permeable choice that offers the look of a traditional paver.

A number of other eco-friendly materials also are available. Robert says recycled tumbled glass chips can be used around fountains and birdbaths or to create a colorful faux stream bed. Another option is reclaimed broken concrete. Dollin favors compost mulch, such as Sing Farms, a Phoenix-area manufac-

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"A path can give you unique views of your garden from different angles, making your garden experience a lot more enjoyable," says landscape designer César Mazier. He directed this path to take advantage of mountain views.

PATHWAY PLANTINGS

César Mazier makes the following suggestions for vegetation that complements pathway settings:

- If you want a garden filled with plants that survive only on rainfall once established, try agave, barrel cactus, cholla, creosote, hedgehog cactus, ocotillo, prickly pear or saguaro.
- To create an area that offers blossoms throughout the year, select vegetation with varied flowering times. Summer bloomers include desert bird of paradise, desert marigold and varieties of senna; fairy duster is ideal for fall; aloe and rosemary plants bloom in winter; and in spring, just about any plant will provide a colorful show.
- Wildflower gardens offer a visual treat in late winter and spring. Try incorporating desert marigold, poppy, angelita daisy and penstemon. Be sure to sow seeds in fall for springtime blooms.

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Pavers set in a diamond pattern between rows of rocks create a trail in this desert landscape.

turer. He says mulch retains water to reduce runoff, helps fertilize soil, and has a spongy texture that is soft underfoot. A compost mulch pathway will require occasional touch-ups, he comments.

SIGHTS TO SEE

"In every area there is an opportunity," Mazier states. "You have to find a stopping place for benches, a table, a reading area—a place where you can look at and get into nature." Following are a few ideas for creating points of interest along a trail:

- **Benches.** Resting places are common additions to walkways, Mazier notes. To incorporate a bench, look for a spot that offers a unique view or perhaps shade under a tree. He advises expanding the path out in this area to form a half circle to accommodate a sitting area.

- **Yard art.** If you have a place along a path where plants won't grow, try yard art, sculpture or a fun garden stake instead, suggests Mazier. These often are affordable alternatives to having to replace a series of dead plants due to unaccommodating soil, and they introduce visual interest in the garden as well.

- **Create an event.** Look for areas in a landscape that present a spot to stop and "contemplate something else," says Dollin. Consider adding such attractions as fire pits, bird feeders or fountains. □

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