

Landscaping with Pavers: Practical Design Ideas for Your Yard

I have spent enough weekends kneeling on compacted gravel and sweeping polymeric sand into cracks to know that hardscaping is not just about getting from the driveway to the front door. Done right, landscaping with pavers changes how you use your outdoor space. The key is knowing which paver works for which job and, just as important, what goes underneath it. I want to walk through some of the choices and trade-offs I have seen work best, especially when you are mixing hard surfaces with something like artificial grass or a backyard putting green.

Start with the Base, Not the Paver

Every contractor I have talked to, whether they work with Belgard pavers or Techo-Bloc, says the same thing: the base matters more than the paver itself. A paver base of compacted gravel, usually four to six inches deep for a walkway and deeper for a driveway, spreads the load and prevents settling. Skip this step and you will be releveling stones inside two years. I have seen it happen with interlocking pavers that looked perfect on installation day and turned into a wavy mess after one wet winter. Landscape fabric between the gravel and the sand layer keeps weeds from germinating, which is a simple step that saves a lot of weeding later.



Polymeric sand in the joints is another nonnegotiable for me. Regular sand washes out or gets dug out by ants. The polymeric stuff hardens when wet and locks the pavers together. Sweep it in, mist it lightly, and let it set. It keeps the surface stable and stops weeds from finding a home. That is the sort of detail that separates a job that lasts from one that needs repairs every spring.

Concrete Pavers vs. Permeable Pavers

Concrete pavers are the workhorse of the industry. You see them everywhere because they are durable, affordable, and come in enough shapes and colors to suit most houses. I lean toward the larger formats like the ones Unilock pavers or Calstone pavers make, because they cover ground faster and the fewer joints mean less sand to maintain. But concrete is not always the best choice for every spot. If you are paving a patio that sits over tree roots or clay soil, a rigid concrete slab can crack. Individual pavers, by contrast, can move a little without ruining the whole surface.

Permeable pavers are gaining traction in California, especially where stormwater management is a concern. These units have wider gaps or special shapes that allow water to drain through

the surface and into the ground below. I installed a small permeable paver apron around a downspout last year, and it completely eliminated the puddle that used to form next to the foundation. The trick with permeable systems is the base. You need a deep layer of clean, open-graded gravel, and often a French drain underneath, to handle the water volume. It is more excavation, but it solves drainage without adding gutters or dry wells.

Mixing Pavers with Turf and Artificial Grass

One of the most common requests I hear is for a yard that blends hardscape with soft green areas. That is where [landscaping with pavers](#) meets the turf side of the job. Flagstone paths set into a bed of artificial grass create a clean, low-maintenance look. The contrast between the stone and the green is striking, and because the grass never needs mowing, the edges stay crisp. I have used this combination around fire pits and seating areas, and it always gets compliments.

For a backyard putting green, the transition from paver to artificial grass needs to be flush. A raised edge is a tripping hazard and a ball-stopper. I cut the turf to butt against a row of Santa Barbara pavers or a concrete paver border, using paver edging to keep everything in place. The result is a smooth surface where the putts roll from the green onto the patio without catching. That continuity matters for anyone who wants to practice short game at home without frustration.

Retaining wall blocks can serve as a visual and functional divider between a paver patio and a raised turf area. I built a small L-shaped wall with retaining wall blocks to separate a dining patio from a dog run covered in artificial grass. The blocks hold back the soil, create a seat height on the patio side, and give the whole yard a structured feel. It is one of those moves that looks intentional rather than accidental.

Edging and Transitions

Paver edging is not glamorous, but it is the difference between a clean installation and one that starts to wander. Without something solid along the perimeter, the outer pavers shift over time. I prefer a rigid plastic or aluminum edge that gets staked into the base before the pavers go down. It holds the line and makes the whole surface more durable. For curves, there are flexible edging strips that bend without kinking. They cost a little more but save time on cutting.

Transitions between different materials need attention too. Where a concrete paver path meets a flagstone patio, the joint should be straight and the heights should match. I use a thin strip of paver edging at the seam to keep both sides stable. If the transition is from paver to turf, a broom finish on the concrete pavers next to the grass gives a subtle texture change that signals the shift underfoot.

Practical Considerations for Climate and Use

In California, where I do most of my work, the climate is dry enough that freeze-thaw cycles are not a major concern. That means we can use interlocking pavers without worrying about heaving. But in areas that do get frost, the base depth needs to increase, and the paver type matters. Belgard pavers, for example, have a dense structure that handles freeze-thaw better than some softer concrete units. Always check the manufacturer's specs for your region.



Drainage is still important even in dry climates. Water that pools on a paver surface breeds algae and creates slippery spots. A slight slope, about a quarter inch per foot, is usually enough to shed water. If the ground is flat, consider installing a French drain at the low edge to carry water away. I have also used permeable pavers in a strip down the middle of a solid concrete paver patio to handle the runoff from the surrounding hardscape. It works well and adds visual interest.

Maintenance on a paver surface is straightforward but not zero. Polymeric sand may need to be reapplied every few years as the joints settle. Weeds can still pop up if the sand degrades, so I keep a small bag of polymeric sand on hand for spot repairs. A pressure washer on a low setting cleans the surface without blasting the sand out of the joints. For artificial grass next to pavers, a stiff broom and an occasional rinse keep the fibers looking fresh.

Blending Styles with Natural Stone

Not every paver job has to use manufactured units. Flagstone, cut into irregular shapes and set on a compacted gravel base, gives a more organic feel. It works especially well around a backyard putting green because the natural edges soften the transition between the hardscape and the turf. I have used flagstone in combination with Techo-Bloc pavers to create a patio that has both a formal dining area and a casual fire pit zone. The contrast keeps the space from feeling monotonous.

Santa Barbara pavers, which are sometimes called cobble pavers, have a rounded, tumbled look that suits Spanish or Mediterranean style homes. They pair well with artificial grass because the soft green offsets the warm tones of the stone. I laid a Santa Barbara paver path through a small side yard last year, bordered by landscape fabric and topped with decomposed granite. It gave the narrow space a sense of destination without overwhelming it.

Cost and Value

Good landscaping with pavers is not cheap, but it adds real value to a property. A well-installed paver patio or walkway lasts decades with minimal upkeep. The upfront cost includes excavation, base materials, the pavers themselves, and labor. Permeable pavers and high-end brands like Techo-Bloc or Calstone pavers cost more than basic concrete pavers, but the aesthetic and durability can justify the premium. I tell people to invest in the base and the edging, and then choose the paver that fits their budget. A cheap paver on a good base will outperform an expensive paver on a bad base every time.

For homeowners who want a backyard putting green, the paver surround is often the biggest line item. But it is also the part that makes the green feel like a real feature rather than an afterthought. A border of interlocking pavers with a broom finish gives the green a defined edge and a place to walk without stepping on the turf. It is a small detail that elevates the whole installation.

I have seen too many projects where someone skipped the base or used the wrong sand and ended up with a wavy, weedy mess. Landscaping with pavers is not complicated, but it rewards patience and the right materials. Take the time to dig deep, compact the gravel, and set the edging properly. The result will be a surface that stays level, drains well, and looks good for years.