

## How to Lay a Brick Patio

Using bricks or pavers to make a patio is very prevalent in the Southwest. The results can be truly beautiful, and the project can be done in sections, so a do-it-yourselfer can tackle the project no matter how big it may be.

Assuming you already know the square footage of the project area, you need to order the right number and color of bricks or pavers. Your local brick yard will be more than happy to help you, and most will also carry the mortar mix you need. Unless you own a big truck and fork lift, they will also handle the delivery, so it's a good idea to know exactly where you want them to set your materials before they arrive. Do not have them set the materials too close to your work area.

Mortar mix comes in 80 pound bags. You can get roughly 10 square feet per bag done with the system I'll outline here. I have found that a decent rectangular, notched trowel works best with this system too.

You need a rock free, reasonably level ground surface to work with. A little more effort before you start laying the pavers will save you on mortar mix, and also make the job look way better when you're done. Scrape the high spots into the low spots until you have a flat, smooth area on which to lay the pavers.

Start in a corner, next to the house if that's where your patio will be, leaving about a quarter inch gap to the concrete. Even if you're working in the middle of the yard, you want to start with a corner.

Spread the dry mortar mix on the ground about half an inch thick, in an area big enough to lay the whole corner, say six pavers or so. Make sure the mortar mix is smooth and flat.

Start by laying the three pavers that make up your corner, in whatever pattern you're going to use. Tap the pavers lightly into the powder, making sure they are level with each other and spacing is even and correct. Use a level to make sure they not only level with each other, but level.

Continue laying pavers six at a time and checking for level until you come to a point at which you have about an hour before you have to stop for the day.

Now take the flat square end of the trowel and cut the edges of the mortar mix even with the pavers, so it's neat and square all the way from the surface to the dirt. Make sure you don't have any adjustments to make: all your joints are even, all the spacing is correct, all your edges are square.

Using a hose, preferably with a sprinkler type nozzle, lightly rinse the pavers, wetting the mortar mix underneath through the spaces. Do not blast water on them, gently wet and rinse the area, then stop and wait for the pavers to start to dry, and then gently rinse them again. Try to wet them down two or three times over the next hour or so.

Clean up your work area to get ready for the next time you're ready to work on your patio. Be sure to set bags of mortar mix somewhere where they won't get wet.

When your entire patio is finished, and all the mortar mix under them is dry too, say two days after the last time you wet it down, you can grout the joints. I use the same dry mortar mix, but you could use actual sanded grout if you want color.

I grout the joints by dumping mortar mix on the surface and spreading it back and forth across the joints in every direction until they are filled and there are no holes. Work steadily across the surface, using a small dust broom to remove the excess and pull it onto the next section. Sometimes a gentle tap will help the mortar mix sink into the joints all the way.

Once the entire patio is grouted, you will be rinsing it the same as before, gently. Be sure to rinse as much extra grout as possible off without rinsing it of the joints. When you've rinsed it once, let it start to dry, and then do it again. Two or three times are usually enough. Let the whole thing dry over night.

If there are any spots of grout you can remove them by gently using a wire brush, but be careful not to harm the pavers. Voila! Now you're ready to build the awning over the patio, right?