

# Goodbye TO GRASS

Could you go grass free? Low maintenance **STYLISH PAVING** may be the answer

A garden doesn't need to have grass to look inviting. Stone paving slabs, like those in reader Yasmin Amir-Ansari's garden, create a mellow backdrop to plants and pots and look as if they have been in place for years. They're easy to keep clean, although it may be worth investing in a pressure washer for regular cleaning to keep algae and moss at bay. Slabs also provide a reliably flat surface for placing chairs, tables and a fire pit or barbecue.

Natural stone comes in a wide variety of colours, such as coffee-cream, buff or blue-grey which can be mixed and matched with plant choices. Warmer colours mix with soft pink and purple flowers, while blue-greys complement evergreens such as box balls and lavender. Concrete pavers are considerably cheaper and are also available in a range of colours and

textures. A new generation of hard surfaces such as porcelain, granite and basalt look dramatic but come with a higher price tag and require specialist installation.

Christopher Rixton, garden designer at Greenbird Gardening Ltd, recently transformed a plot in Portishead, Somerset. "The garden of the 1980s house was a combination of a muddy lawn, gravel, an old pond, broken paving stones, overgrown conifers and weeds. The clients both worked long hours and wanted to be able to spend every minute enjoying their outdoor space rather than having to maintain it by mowing a lawn."

Instead of grass, Christopher used a mix of Scandinavian softwood decking, man-made Courtyard paving, which is a grey green colour and has a worn stone effect, and Scottish beach pebbles. "I used four key surfaces in the garden

SMALL  
GARDENS  
BIG  
IDEAS

*"We created a relaxed, informal space to be enjoyed rather than maintained."*

Garden designer Christopher Rixton

WWW.GREENBIRDGARDENING.CO.UK

**SOFTWOOD DECKING**  
replaces old gravel for clean, usable areas to relax in.

**RAISED BEDS PACKED**  
with a cheerful mix of sunny rudbeckia, floppy geraniums and sky-reaching verbena soften the hard surfaces.

**A RECYCLING BIN**  
store keeps unsightly boxes in one place and out of view.

AFTER

## Choosing paving slabs

Before you choose which slabs to buy, consider where they will be used and the overall look you're after.

\* Concrete is the cheapest form of paving, with slabs designed to look like stone. They don't just come in boring grey, concrete can be dyed in different colours and imprinted with various textures to create interest. They are durable, safe, strong and adaptable to all weather conditions, including frost. Suitable for walkways, driveways and patios, they're also relatively easy to install, as they can be laid directly onto the ground on a base of builders' sand. A Cambridge Concrete Textured paving

slab, 450mm x 450mm, costs £4.99 for one [www.homebase.co.uk](http://www.homebase.co.uk)

\* Imported stones, such as sandstone, are budget-friendly and come in various colours. They have different surface finishes called riven, sawn and textured. There is a wide variety of slab sizes, sometimes in irregular shapes, so they can be laid in an informal pattern. Grey slabs are the most practical in terms of maintenance.

It is best to have them laid professionally. This can cost as much as the paving. Per square metre, expect to pay about £22 for ethically sourced stone from [www.londonstone.co.uk](http://www.londonstone.co.uk) and £68 for sandstone from [www.yorkstonesupplies.co.uk](http://www.yorkstonesupplies.co.uk)

### THE OLD GARDEN

had lots of features but had a tired, messy look and no sense of unity.

BEFORE

**COURTYARD PAVING**  
with its worn look and mellow colour makes the patio feel light and spacious.



We LOVE this!



**CURVES AND** circles add interest and depth to this courtyard.

with the aim of creating a relaxed, informal feel. Less than three can look too stark, while more than five can lead to it looking cluttered and smaller than it really is."

Although going grass-free means no more mowing, Christopher cautions that it does still require maintenance to keep hard surfaces looking good, depending on which you choose. "For example, Indian Sandstone is a great choice for colour and texture but if your garden happens to be north facing or gets a lot of shade then, because of its very porous nature, it tends to show algae build-up and dirt more quickly than a dense stone or man-made material such as granite or porcelain, which would be a better choice in that situation," he says.

Garden designer Christopher Masson (info@christophermasson.com) recently created a grass-free space for clients in Richmond, Surrey (see picture, top right). "The garden was especially narrow, at less than 5m wide, with fences on either side, so it would be impossible to have a healthy



**THAT'S CLEVER!** Black fencing recedes, making the garden look wider and, therefore, bigger

**HERRINGBONE** paving breaks up the blocks of raised beds with contrasting colour.

**EVERGREEN FERNS** and other lush foliage nestled among pavers add life and softness to the hardscape.

*"Grass-free doesn't mean green-free."*

GARDEN DESIGNER CHRISTOPHER MASSON



**SMOOTH PEBBLES,** shiny surfaces and bobbly bamboo provide a rich mix of textures.

lawn as it would never get enough light," he explains. "The owners wanted a garden which was straightforward to maintain and, as it's small, they wanted to make sure they used every part of it."

Christopher used two paving surfaces, reclaimed Yorkstone and lbstock brick. "The Yorkstone has a weathered look, so it doesn't compete with the plants. I used it in two areas, and linked it with the brick. This creates a flow through to the summerhouse at the end of the garden, where it also provides a space to place a table and chairs. The brick also helps to define

the white raised beds."

He has used a froth of limelight hydrangeas, together with purple salvia 'Amistad' in the raised beds, and planted white scented jasmine, and a 'Madame Alfred Carrière' climbing rose to scramble along the black painted fence.

"My clients love plants but they wanted a low maintenance space which doesn't look scruffy and the paving helps to achieve this. I often dissuade people from using grass. I reassure them that it doesn't mean you can't have a green looking garden!"



**NATURAL STONE** comes in a range of shades that will work with different plant mixes and furniture colours.



**TINY SQUARES OF PAVING** give a classic cobbled look and suit the informality of the planting in the large square beds, ripe with grasses and mustard-yellow coneflowers.