

BUYER'S GUIDE

# OUTDOOR SURFACES

Make sure your feet meet the right material when you step outside your home WORDS KATHERINE CHATFIELD



PHOTOGRAPHY: (OPPOSITE) CHRIS WARNES, (THIS PAGE) JASON BUSCH, DESIGN: (OPPOSITE) GROWING ROOMS, GROWINGROOMS.COM.AU, (THIS PAGE) LANDART LANDSCAPES, LANDART.COM.AU

**F**loorboards, tiles and carpets can make or break a home's interior, and the materials you use in your outdoor areas are no different. "Using the right surfaces in an outdoor space can make it more functional as well as soft and inviting," says Matt Leacy, director and principal designer of Landart Landscapes (landart.com.au). "You should consider how durable the material is, whether it will brighten up a space and, if it's being used for an entertaining or play area, make sure it feels nice to walk on."

## pavers

"A good dense natural stone, such as travertine or bluestone is hard to go past," says Matt. "You can get it in almost any colour, it gives a great organic feel and is perfect for entertaining areas or around a pool. It resists leaf and red wine stains, needs minimal maintenance, is cool in summer and warm in winter." Sandstone and some limestone varieties also look great, but are more porous so beware of staining.

Non-stone pavers, such as concrete, have advantages. "Concrete is really versatile and comes in brushed or polished finishes," says Matt. "Although it used to be a very cost-effective option, now natural stone pavers are a lot more competitive in price, so do your research before opting for concrete purely for financial reasons."

It's important to ensure all pavers are laid on waterproof slabs or scree beds so no water comes up between the slabs. "The Australian Building Code says slabs must be laid a step down from the house, and need to fall away from the building, so any water doesn't back up into the house," says Matt.



## BRICKS

1. 'Bowral' bricks in St Pauls Cream, \$1849/set of 1000, Austral Bricks, australbricks.com.au. 2. Recycled sandstock bricks, \$3 each, The Brick Pit, thebrickpit.com.au. 3. Recycled dry pressed 'Paving Grade' bricks, \$0.95 each, The Brick Pit, as before.



## PAVERS

1. 'Icon Outdoor' porcelain pavers, \$103/sqm, Di Lorenzo Tile Merchants, dilorenzo.com.au. 2. Bluestone pavers, from \$84.95/sqm, Amber Tiles, ambertiles.com.au. 3. 'Aspentone' pavers in Cappuccino, POA, Boral, boral.com.au/pavers.

## bricks

"Bricks can bring texture and interest," says Matt. "They're great in entertaining areas, as retaining walls or as feature paths. They work well with timber or stone to give a rustic feel to a space."

They are also cost effective, especially if you choose recycled bricks. "These bring a lot of character and can be a very economical way to finish off a garden." However, even if you're buying secondhand bricks, there are choices to be made. "Different bricks have different qualities," says Matt. "Some will be degraded for a rough look, while some will be hand selected. Most suppliers will outline the differences before you buy, so ask for photos from the yard you're buying from to ensure you get the look you're after."





## decking

**“Timber softens an outdoor space,”** says Matt. “It looks good if there’s lots of masonry or retaining walls as it brings some natural relief. It feels really nice underfoot but can get very hot in the sun, so be careful if you’re planning an area for children to play in.”

How much love and attention you need to give timber depends on how you’d like it to look. “If you like a silvery, worn look then you don’t need to do much maintenance,” says Matt. “Give it a coat of natural oil to keep the moisture in, then leave it.” However, if the deck is in full sun and you like a new, clean look, “you’ll need to oil it twice a year.” Remember, when you’re choosing a decking colour, look at a sample that’s been oiled to get a true sense of what it will look like.

Make sure whichever timber you choose is certified under Australian Forestry Standard. “Recycled timber is the most environmentally friendly option. It has imperfections that can bring a lot of character to an outdoor space.”

Keep moisture away from timber by ensuring any decking is laid at least 400mm-500mm away from the waterproof slab it’s laid on. “This ensures sufficient air flow underneath,” says Matt. Composite decking, such as HardieDeck, made from compressed fibre cement, can be a cost-effective solution and suits areas prone to moisture or termites.



## tiles

**Tiles are the lowest maintenance option** out there, although they can be the same price as stone pavers. “Tiles are easy to clean - you just need to hose them down and that’s it,” says Matt. “They’re the hardest-wearing option, too. If they’re laid well on a solid foundation with good grouting, they shouldn’t chip. Encaustic [pressed cement] patterned tiles can make a great feature pathway or give a certain look to the outside of a house but may not be suitable for large areas as they can feel cold and hard underfoot.”

## stones

**Gravel or stones can look great** alongside paving or decking. “Stones provide nice texture and bring some relief from the main body of paving,” says Matt. “They’re a cost-effective way of making a side path, driveway or the space around a vegie patch look great.”

Be careful where you use them though. “They can flick up on to grass and get caught in a lawnmower, or spill out on to pathways and look messy, so use them in low-traffic areas. They are uncomfortable to walk on without shoes, so use them in a winter spot where you won’t have to hobble over them in bare feet.”

A light-coloured stone spread on a pathway can help draw your eye to a certain part of the garden or lift a dark area. Just make sure you have a solid foundation underneath, ideally a compacted roadbase. “The water will run through the stones so there’s no need for special drainage,” says Matt. **10**

### DECKING & STONES

1. **‘Deco’ granite gravel**, from \$62/tonne, Australian Native Landscapes, [anlscape.com.au](http://anlscape.com.au).
2. **Blackbutt timber decking**, from \$90.85/sqm, Boral, [boral.com.au/timber](http://boral.com.au/timber).
3. **Tuscan Path pebbles**, \$25.50/10kg, Bunnings, [bunnings.com.au](http://bunnings.com.au).
4. **Composite decking boards stained in Integrain NaturalStain Merbau**, POA, HardieDeck, [hardiedeck.com.au](http://hardiedeck.com.au).