

Gardening in the ZONE[®]

with Iowa Gardening Magazine's Liz Gilman



Hardscapes

This week we're caught between a rock... and a hardscape! I interviewed Ann Marie VanDerZanden, associate professor of horticulture at Iowa State University, to see just what she means when she uses the term 'hardscape' in the yard.



Ann Marie VanDerZanden in front of a hardscape.

According to VanDerZanden, a landscape has two parts. The plant materials that we often think of first are the softscapes. The constructed additions, such as patios, decks, walkways, birdbaths, benches, trellises, fences or garden sheds are the hardscapes.

Determining which materials to use for your hardscape depends on where the hardscape will be, such as the ground, vertical or overhead spaces. VanDerZanden points out that outdoor rooms are typically part of home landscaping. Here you have a floor, walls, and

ceiling. If you are talking about the floor, you might use something like natural stone or concrete pavers which come in a variety of colors and shapes. Then you move into the walls and you might use something like natural limestone, synthetic wood materials or regular wood. And then when you talk about the ceiling, you could again use regular wood, synthetic wood and maybe even metal.

Most people are familiar with natural materials, but we are seeing many more options with synthetic wood materials. It's made of recycled plastic and saw dust and comes in many shapes and colors. These products are a little more expensive than most other wood products upfront, but most carry a 20 to 25 year warranty. When this longevity is combined with minimal to no maintenance, your long-term costs are less and it's a great way to add sustainability to your landscape.

A final design tip from VanDerZanden is to make sure your hardscape is big enough to accommodate how it will be used. A space as small as 5 ft. by 5 ft. can be enough for a sitting area with two chairs. But you'll need a 10 ft. by 7 ft. area for eight people around a picnic table. Don't undersize your patio if you plan to host a lot of garden parties.

So consider adding some hardscapes to your softscapes. It's really not that hard! 🌿

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