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#### SUMMARY

**Gravel is a wonderful,  
and less expensive,  
landscape material.  
Select the type of gravel  
based on your intended  
function.**

## Gravel Pathways in the Garden

By Earlene Millier, UC Master Gardener

### Gravel pathways are attractive and low cost.

*Q. I would like to incorporate some paved areas in my landscaping, but I don't want to use concrete or pavers because of the expense and permanence. What about gravel? Can I install gravel myself, or do I need to call in a professional?*

**A.** Gravel, used properly, is an ideal "hardscape" material for many landscapes. Generally less expensive than concrete or pavers, it also requires less care and planning, and can be added without professional help.

Gravel has a softer appearance than concrete or pavers, and it allows water to percolate through, reducing runoff. If you later decide to plant an area that has been graveled, it's relatively simple to move this material aside and expose the soil.

Many gravel types are available, but most fit one of two categories: river run (round pieces) or crushed stone (angular pieces).

River run (pea gravel is one example) never packs down completely into a

solid surface. The pieces slip and slide, and so can be difficult to walk on or place furniture on. This type is better suited for a mulch or ground cover, but can work for paths and patios if large stones are incorporated for supporting furniture.

Angular gravel (decomposed granite is a popular type) will pack down to create a nearly solid surface and so generally is considered more useful for paths and patios that will get lots of foot traffic. The smaller the pieces, the easier and more comfortable the surface is for walking. Mixtures of rounded and angular stones also are available.

You can find dozens of gravel types, in a wide range of colors, at stores that sell landscape materials. White gravel will produce some glare; very dark colors will show every bit of litter. Natural browns and grays look good in almost any landscape.

Gravel can be purchased by the bag or pickup load, or you can have larger loads delivered. How much to buy depends



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on the area to be covered and the thickness of the layer. Two inches is a practical minimum depth, but you will need to allow for four inches if thick stones or pavers will be incorporated.

Sketch out the area and record the measurements. Take your sketch to the store, and a clerk will help calculate how much stone you need. A rough rule of thumb is that one ton of gravel will cover 80 to 120 square feet at 2 inches of depth.

To create a manicured look and keep the gravel from migrating into adjacent soil, you will want a border of Bender Board, its plastic imitators, or rock, pavers, bricks or lumber. Whether to use landscape fabric under the gravel is debated among landscapers. Fabric will suppress weed growth from below, but it will do nothing to stop weed seeds on top of the gravel from germinating. It will keep the gravel from mixing with the soil below as long as it remains intact. If you decide to use fabric, I recommend choosing the heaviest weight available.



Photo: JERRY NAUNHEIM JR./KRT.  
A curving gravel and timber path is edged by lush grasses and shrubs.