

## ASK THE BUILDER

Q: I have a cement sidewalk/walkway and I don't care for the way it looks. Should I replace it or do you have any ideas?

A: There are a lot of options these days when dealing with cement. Rather than going through a laborious and costly removal and replacement; consider these treatments.

- 1) **Concrete stain.** There are stains that chemically react with the lime in concrete that you can use with new or old concrete. This product is perfect for the "do-it-yourselfer" because it is relatively simple to apply. It can be sprayed on in two to three coats using a garden sprayer and then a sealer can be applied with a paint roller. The result is a durable, long lasting mottled look that will last for years.
  
- 2) **Scoring.** Scoring is done with a concrete cutting machine. By measuring and using a chalk line as a marker. You make shallow 1/8" cuts in the surface of the concrete to give you a "tile" look. You can rent these machines from your local rental companies; but it is recommended that this process is done by a professional.
  
- 3) **Surface overlay.** Thin layers of cementuous and other materials can be applied to the surface of the concrete and can be used to repair cracks and bring a textured look. These products are troweled on to the surface. The colors are endless and the application fairly simple for the homeowner. After drying, a sealer must then be applied using a sprayer or roller.

When using stains and overlays you must consider the proper concrete preparations. With stain, you may look at having the surface media or bead blasted and power washed prior to applying the stain. If the surface has a broom finish; it is possible to just power-wash with a minimum 3000psi power washer. This procedure would also be sufficient when using a surface overlay.

If these ideas aren't what you have in mind; consider having the walkway removed and installing a colored, stamped concrete, concrete pavers or possibly flagstone. A simpler and less expensive option could be using a flexible garden border and filling that with gravel or decomposed granite, gravel or bark.

Always consider that when working with chemicals you should wear the proper protective gear and may have excess that you should always dispose of properly.