

Directing Landscape Traffic

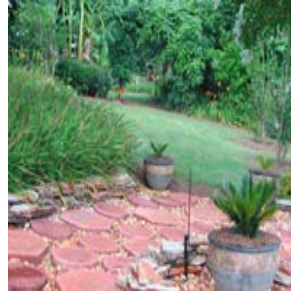


Photo special to the Democrat: One solution to a path created by foot traffic is to lay out some sort of stepping stones or pavers on which to walk.

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Because of excessive foot traffic and pet activity, we often end up with undesirable paths in our lawns and groundcover beds. These paths are not only unsightly, but they also result in compacted soil and sometimes erosion of the soil.

People will usually choose the most direct path towards a destination such as an entrance or a seating area. Pets will often favor a shaded area or one near a fence or shrubbery border. Unfortunately all turfgrasses and groundcover plants will tolerate only so much foot traffic before they are trampled. This then makes them subject to disease and decay.

One solution that is often acceptable is to convert the worn path into a walkway by the use of a mulch. There are many organic and inorganic mulch materials from which to choose. These can be kept in place and defined with an edging if desired. Organic mulches allow for the penetration of water and air to the soil and when they break down they benefit the soil structure. Organic mulches often used in our area include pine straw, pine bark, chipped wood, and recycled yard debris. Common inorganic mulches include pea gravel, river rock, road base, and decomposed granite. Quartz based stones such as river rock and pea gravel do not affect soil pH. However road base and other limestone rocks can raise soil pH, making conditions unfavorable for acid-loving plants such as azaleas. Some other concerns to consider include the possibility of mulches

being carried away from the pathways by foot traffic or rain. Weed intrusion and the potential of loose mulch causing someone to slip or fall are other concerns.

Another solution to paths created by foot traffic is to lay out stepping stones, bricks, recycled concrete, wood, or flagstones to walk on. They may be seated in the existing soil, a bed of sand or in concrete, depending on how well they need to be anchored and the presence of tree roots that may need to be conserved. Paths can also be paved with concrete, asphalt or other materials. Materials that are very smooth may prove to be hazardous to walk on when wet. So rough surfaces are preferable. In some locations the use of bollards and chain, low fencing, or raised edging materials may be appropriate to direct traffic away from an area.

There are a number of possible landscaping solutions for directing foot traffic. The use of shrubs and large perennials in planting beds can help redirect traffic. In some locations the plants must be tall enough or planted close enough to each other to discourage pedestrians from trying to walk between the plants. A raised berm, especially when planted with shrubs and groundcovers can prove to be very effective. The incorporation of boulders into a landscape can add to the visual interest and help serve as a barrier to foot traffic.

Whatever solution is chosen for managing landscape traffic, it should be appropriate for the site. Bollards and chains may be an appropriate barrier in a public park or a very large landscape but will likely look out of place in the average home landscape. With a little effort landscape traffic can be redirected and undesirable, worn pathways in the lawn can be avoided in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing.

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