

WOODLAND STREAM



Many yards have at least one sloping area or embankment and many home owners want to do more than blanket it with ground cover. Single ground cover certainly helps with erosion, but just isn't that interesting to look at. So, why not make a statement with that hillside if you've got one? Retaining walls can expand your usable space, and interest to your garden and add curb appeal to your property. It might even become you favorite spot to hang out at home! Our Hillside Garden demonstrates many techniques for making eye-catching use of a slope. We show a variety of retaining wall materials and configurations, as well as how you can incorporate plant life into the structure for a beautifully more natural appearance. On the following pages we show you a few types of blocks you can use. But remember, there are multiple options out there, and one that's perfect for your project.

Getting Started!



This project as a DIY can be very rewarding, but also overwhelming. That's why we're here, to get you started right. There are some basic steps to make sure everything comes out right, and having the right tools is part of that. Minimally you'll need digging tools to clear the way, a level for the foundation and each block as placed, a measuring tape for the perfect fit, a mallet & chisel for custom fitting occasional blocks, and string & stakes for a sight-line for placing each row of blocks. That's a beginning and enough for nearly any project. Next, let's look at some blocks.

HILLSIDE GARDEN (continued)



Keystone Stacking Blocks: These are popular in San Diego County. They come in a few sizes, colors, and edge types, so it's easy to find the right fit for you. The blocks shown here are small (12"x4"x8") medium gray keystones. They can be stacked in a perfectly straight line or curved. You can curve them around (convex) areas as shown here, or behind (concave) areas as a backdrop. An advantage to keystone over brick and mortar walls is they stack without mortar. There's adhesive you can use between rows but it's just not needed. If you place capstones on top for a more finished look, you probably want to adhere them.



Keystone Stacking Blocks (continued): Another advantage to blocks over brick and mortar stacking is that you may not need the level after laying the first row. Because you're not slapping mortar between rows, they lay flat and level without adjustment. That means they install quicker too. Of course, as with any block wall, be sure to back-fill each row with sand and/or gravel for good drainage. The keystone shown here is large (16"x6"x10"), and tan or buff color. It's size makes it more appropriate for a larger wall in a larger yard. When installed it looks basically the same, as the smaller keystone block above.



Interlocking Mortar-less Retaining Blocks: Along with the advantages of not mixing mortar or having to level each row, interlocking blocks can serve as planters! Designed to stack and lock in place, the tops and centers are left open and more than big enough to plant in. Any type of creeping, vining or cascading plant can be used to soften the look of the wall and add to the plant life in your yard. Pretty much any plant species that thrives in dry, well-drained soil will do well here when sun exposure is right as well. These blocks also come in different sizes and colors, so you can get a look unique to your garden.

HILLSIDE GARDEN (continued)



Interlocking, Oblong, Stacking Blocks: These have a very special purpose. Unlike the blocks with open centers and tops for planting, these are designed to leave niches on the wall surface itself to plant in. So, you're not limited to planting on top of the wall to cascade down. You can plant all over the face of the wall itself and cover more of the wall sooner. The trick is that because of their oblong shape, where each row stacks on the row beneath, an opening is formed about 3-4" wide. Imagine how many openings a 8'L x 3'H wall would have. Probably 20+ planters. All this and a wall, too? Win-win!



Growing Magic: You don't have to limit yourself to planting in the tops and crevices of your installed blocks. The blocks shown here were installed with stakes at the top. We attached guide lines to the stakes and anchored them to the ground. This allowed us to plant vines that seem to be growing on, or even *from* the blocks. The plants are strong enough to grow and stand on their own, but the guide lines give them direction. Since they cascade, they *seem* to have sprouted there and grew along the blocks. And we didn't limit our retaining system to one type of block. Or for that matter, even to blocks themselves.



Mixing It Up: Mixing different materials together, can give you a completely different look and effect. In this case, we used boulders for the bottom of the slope to add to the natural look of our Hillside Garden. It also gave us several more opportunities to plant low-growing shrubs and ground covers. This filled in spots between stones and boosted the erosion control and the natural look. Featured here is our waterfall that feeds a stream under the adjacent walkway to a circulating pump. This is a favorite spot for many visitors to rest and reflect. You may think a waterfall can't be water-wise. Ask us how to do it!