

- Make a drawing of the shape of your project. It doesn't have to be to scale, but it should show every feature that affects the shape and size of your project. Use it to make sure you have measured everything. A "plan" view drawing shows length and width, and how the area would look if you were looking down at it from above, like a map. An "elevation" view drawing shows height, and how the area would look if you were looking at it horizontally from the street or across the yard.
- For an irregular shaped patio, make a drawing with measurements, and divide it up into simple shapes – rectangles, triangles, and partial circles – to make it easy to calculate the areas and add them together.
- For bulk materials – patio base and setting beds, or ground cover – you need to know the depth of material as well as length x width. Depth will be determined by your site conditions: is it packed ground, loose backfill around a new house, or something in between? For paving, depth will be determined by paver manufacturer's specifications.
- For steps, measure the height from bottom to top: from the ground level to the destination (to the door sill or to the finished height of the upper level). The length will be determined by the number of steps necessary, plus the size of any landing desired. Measure out from the house, or from the edge of the upper level above the steps, to any obstruction (like an existing walkway or driveway) to determine how much room is available for steps. The width of steps to a door should allow for room to swing the door, and provide for safe comfortable entrance and exit. For curved steps, remember that, with each step, the bottom will grow wider in all directions; make sure you have room.
- For a curving or irregular wall, lay out the shape you want with a garden hose, marking the beginning and end with tape. Then straighten it out and measure the length.
- If your ground slopes, measure the difference in height at regular intervals along the length and width of your project. Set up stakes at the corners, then stretch a level string from one stake to the next, using a line-level. Then you can measure down from the string to the ground at regular intervals to get the difference in height.