

# **Brick Patios and Walkways: Repairing, Repointing, and Keeping Them Level**

What to Do When Your Brick Patio Sinks, Shifts, or Sprouts

Weeds

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## **Chapter 1: Brick Patio Repair — Why Patios Fail and How to Think About Fixing Them**

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A brick patio is the hardest-working masonry on your property. Your walls stand there in the weather. Your patio takes the weather plus your feet, your furniture, your grill, your kids, your dog, and every gallon of rain your roof sheds onto it — all while sitting on dirt that moves. When somebody calls me about brick patio repair, the patio is usually telling one of three stories: it's sinking, it's coming apart at the joints, or it's being taken over by weeds. Sometimes all three at once.

I've been laying and repairing brick for fifty years, and I'll tell you the truth most contractors won't: almost every failed brick patio failed at the base, not at the brick. The brick is the victim. The base — the soil preparation, the gravel, the sand, the compaction, the drainage — is the criminal. A patio laid on a proper base with proper drainage will outlive you. A patio laid on scraped dirt with a prayer will be sinking before the mortgage is paid off. The repair has to fix the cause, not the symptom, or you'll be paying for it twice.

This book is the complete guide: how brick patios and walkways are built, why they fail, how to diagnose yours, when to lift and relay versus when to repoint, what the base work actually involves, what it costs in 2026, and how to keep it level for decades after the repair. No cussing, no games, no invented numbers — just straight talk from a man who's fixed thousands of these.

One thing before we start: brick patio repair and brick paver repair are the same conversation. Whether your patio is traditional clay brick or modern concrete pavers, the base principles, the failure modes, and the repairs are identical. I'll say "brick" through this book and mean both.

## Chapter 2: Sand-Set vs. Mortar-Set — Know What You're Standing On

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Before you fix anything, you need to know which kind of patio you have, because the two types fail differently and repair differently.

**Sand-set (dry-laid)** is the modern standard: brick laid tight on a bed of sand over compacted gravel, with sand swept into the joints. No mortar. The whole patio is flexible — it can move slightly with freeze-thaw and soil movement without cracking, and individual bricks can be lifted out and replaced. This is what most brick patios built in the last forty years are, and it's the better system for patios in most of Texas. When a sand-set patio fails, the fix is lifting the bricks, fixing the base, and relaying them. The bricks themselves are usually fine.

**Mortar-set** is the old way: brick laid in a mortar bed, often over a concrete slab, with mortared joints — basically a brick wall laid flat. It's rigid. It looks crisp and formal, and on a stable base it's beautiful. But rigid plus moving soil equals cracked joints and broken bonds. When a mortar-set patio

fails, the fix is repointing the joints or, when the base has failed underneath, tearing out and rebuilding. You can't just lift and relay mortared brick — the mortar bond breaks and you're starting over.

**How to tell which you have:** look at the joints. If the joints are filled with sand that you can scrape out with a screwdriver, it's sand-set. If the joints are hard mortar, it's mortar-set. If the patio sits on a visible concrete slab edge, it's mortar-set over concrete. If you can rock an individual brick with your foot, it's sand-set — mortared bricks don't rock individually, they crack.

This distinction drives every decision in this book. Sand-set problems are base problems with a straightforward fix. Mortar-set problems are base problems with an expensive fix. Know which you're standing on before you spend a dollar.

## Chapter 3: Why Brick Patios Sink

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Nine out of ten sunken patios I get called to sink for the same handful of reasons. Here's the lineup, in order of how often I see them:

**Poor compaction.** The number-one killer. The installer scraped off the grass, threw down some sand, and laid brick on soil that was never compacted. Loose soil settles under load and water, and the patio settles with it. Proper base work means excavating to undisturbed soil, laying compacted gravel in lifts — layers compacted one at a time — and then the sand bed. Every lift that gets skipped is settling waiting to happen. Most failed patios I lift up have no real base at all — just brick on sand on dirt.

**Water undermining the base.** Water is the enemy of every base. Downspouts dumping onto the patio, grading that funnels water under it, irrigation soaking it daily — water washes the sand bed out from under the bricks and softens the soil beneath. The patio develops dips and channels exactly where the water runs. In Texas, where a spring storm can drop inches in an hour, drainage failures show up fast.

**Expansive clay soil.** Texas black clay swells when wet and shrinks when dry, and a patio sitting on it rides that cycle. The movement is usually uneven — wetter on one side, drier on the other — so the patio doesn't just move, it twists. Sand-set patios handle this better than mortar-set, because they can flex. But enough cycling will defeat any patio that doesn't have a proper compacted base separating the brick from the soil.

**Tree roots.** Roots don't respect patios. A root growing under a patio lifts it from below, creating a ridge or a heave that gets worse every year. Oak and pecan roots are the usual suspects in Texas. The lift is slow — a quarter inch a year — until one day the patio has a speed bump in it.

**Buried organic material.** The old stump that got ground down and buried, the construction debris backfilled in the yard, the topsoil that was never stripped — organic material decomposes, and when it does, the ground above it sinks. I lift patios and find the ghost of a tree stump underneath more often than you'd believe. This is why proper excavation strips everything down to undisturbed mineral soil before the base goes in.

**Edge failure.** Patios spread at the edges. Without a solid edge

restraint, the outer bricks creep outward over time, the joints open up, and the whole patio loosens from the outside in. The edge is the frame that holds the picture together, and a lot of patios were built without one.

The pattern: the brick almost never fails. The ground under it does. Every repair in this book starts from that understanding.

## Chapter 4: The Diagnosis Walk — Reading Your Patio Like a Mason

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Before you call anybody — before you spend anything — walk your patio like a mason. Fifteen minutes, bare feet if you're brave, and you'll know what's wrong and roughly what it'll take to fix.

**Map the low spots.** After a rain, look at where water stands. Standing water marks every dip and low area. Or do it dry: lay a long straight board or string line across the patio and look for gaps underneath. Mark the low areas with chalk. If the whole patio has settled evenly — everything an inch lower than it was — that's uniform settlement, usually poor compaction. If there are isolated dips, that's localized base failure, washout, or buried debris.

**Check against fixed points.** The patio should meet the house, the steps, and any edging at a consistent height. If the patio has dropped away from the house foundation or the back door threshold, that's settlement. Note the gap — a half inch is maintenance, two inches is a real repair. Also check the slope: a patio should slope gently away from the house,

roughly a quarter inch per foot. If it slopes toward the house, or if it used to slope away and now doesn't, water is going where it shouldn't.

**Rock the bricks.** Walk the patio slowly and feel for rocking or loose bricks. In a sand-set patio, individual rocking bricks mean the sand bed has washed out or compacted unevenly underneath them. Note where they are — clusters of loose brick mark the failed area. In a mortar-set patio, look for cracked joints and hollow sounds instead; tap suspect areas with a hammer handle and listen for the hollow drum of a debonded section.

**Read the weeds.** Weeds growing in the joints tell you the joints have opened up and filled with dirt — which tells you the patio has loosened. A few weeds at the edges are normal. Weeds across the whole field mean the joints are shot everywhere. Also note where the weeds are worst: along the edges means edge failure, in lines means joint washout following water flow.

**Look at the edges.** Walk the perimeter. Are the edge bricks creeping outward? Is there a gap between the patio and the edging? Is the edging itself heaved or broken? Edge failure announces itself clearly if you look.

**Check the drainage.** Where do the downspouts discharge? Where does water go in a hard rain? Is there a low spot in the yard funneling water under the patio? Is irrigation spraying it daily? Water source identified is half the repair planned.

**Photograph everything.** Chalk marks, low spots with water standing, the worst areas. Date the photos. When the contractor arrives, hand him the map. A homeowner who's done the diagnosis walk gets better bids — the contractor knows you're paying attention, and he prices the real job instead of the scary one.

What you're not diagnosing on this walk: what's under the patio. That's what lifting a few bricks reveals, and that's the contractor's job. But your walk tells him where to lift.

## Chapter 5: Lift and Relay — The Right Fix for a Sunken Sand-Set Patio

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Lift and relay is the signature repair for a sunken sand-set brick patio, and it's one of the most satisfying jobs in masonry: the patio comes up, the base gets fixed properly, the same bricks go back down, and it looks new. Here's what the job actually involves, so you know what you're paying for.

**Lifting.** The bricks come up in the affected area — sometimes a section, sometimes the whole patio. A good crew numbers or photographs the pattern if it's intricate, stacks the bricks neatly, and sets aside any broken units for replacement. This is careful work, not demolition. The bricks are the asset; the base was the problem.

**Base excavation.** Everything failed comes out: the old sand bed, any failed gravel, and soil down to undisturbed, solid ground. If there's buried organic material — the stump ghost, construction debris — it comes out now. This is the step that separates a lasting repair from a repeat. Excavation depth depends on the soil and the patio's use, but the principle is absolute: you build on solid ground or you build on a future

repair.

**The new base.** Compacted gravel — typically crushed stone, not round pea gravel, because angular stone locks together — laid in lifts and compacted with a plate compactor, each lift before the next goes down. Then a bedding layer of coarse sand, screeded level to the right height and slope. The base is the patio. Everything above it is decoration.

**Relaying.** The bricks go back in the original pattern, tight joints, checked constantly against string lines for level and slope. The patio must slope away from the house — that quarter inch per foot — because a level patio is a pond. Replacement bricks for broken units get blended in; on an older patio, the new bricks will look new for a season and then weather in.

**Joint sand and compaction.** Sand swept into the joints, the whole patio run over with a plate compactor (with a pad to protect the brick), more sand swept in, compacted again. The compaction seats the bricks into the sand bed and locks the joints. Then edging gets reset or replaced, and the perimeter gets locked.

**What it costs.** Paver and patio repair runs \$7 to \$30 per

**square foot** in published 2026 data, with lift-and-relay work landing in that range depending on how much base work is needed. A small section — say a 10-by-10 dip — is hundreds. A full 400-square-foot patio lifted and relayed with a proper new base is thousands. The base work is the cost: excavation, gravel, compaction, and disposal run the number more than the brick work does. That's correct. You're buying a new foundation for your patio.

**When lift-and-relay is wrong:** if the bricks themselves are shot — badly spalled, crumbling — relaying bad brick is polishing a turd. If the patio is mortar-set, there's no lifting; it's a different repair. And if the drainage that killed the base isn't fixed, the new base dies the same death. Fix the water or don't bother.

## Chapter 6: Repointing a Brick Patio — When the Joints Are the Problem

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Not every patio problem is a sinking problem. Sometimes the base is fine and the joints are shot — sand washed out of a sand-set patio, or mortar crumbled out of a mortar-set one. That's a repointing job, and it's a different animal from lift-and-relay.

**Sand-set joint restoration.** When the joints of a sand-set patio have washed out or filled with dirt and weeds, the fix is cleaning out the joints and refilling them — usually with polymeric sand, which we'll cover in Chapter 8. The process: kill the weeds, pressure-wash the joints clean (carefully — too much pressure undermines the sand bed), let it dry thoroughly, sweep in the new joint sand, compact, sweep again, and mist to activate. It's straightforward work, and on a patio with a sound base it makes the whole thing look and feel new. Cost-wise, joint restoration is the cheapest meaningful patio repair there is — a fraction of lift-and-relay, because you're not touching the base.

**Mortar-set repointing.** When the mortar joints of a mortar-

set patio have crumbled, the fix is cutting out the failed mortar and packing in new — same craft as wall repointing, done on your knees. Published 2026 data puts patio repointing at **\$3 to \$15 per square foot**, or **\$450 to \$2,000** for a typical 12-by-12 patio. The range depends on how much joint is failed, how deep the cut needs to go, and how fussy the matching is. The same rules apply as wall repointing: cut deep enough to reach sound mortar, match the mortar type, and tool the joints properly.

**The judgment call: repoint or relay?** If the patio is level and solid and only the joints are bad — repoint. If the patio is sinking, rocking, or holding water — the joints are a symptom, and repointing without fixing the base is makeup on a fracture. Here's the test: if more than a small area needs lifting to get it level, it's a lift-and-relay job with joint restoration included. If it's flat and tight and just ugly at the joints, it's a repoint.

**The Texas note:** our heat and our storms are brutal on patio joints. Mortar-set patio joints in Texas live a harder life than wall joints — standing water, direct sun, foot traffic, and thermal cycling all day. Expect mortar-set patio joints to need attention sooner than the walls of the same house. And sand-

set joints in Texas need topping up every few years as a matter of routine — it's maintenance, not failure.

## Chapter 7: Weeds, Moss, and Ants — The Living Enemies

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A brick patio is an ecosystem whether you want it to be or not. Joints collect dirt, dirt grows weeds, damp shade grows moss, and ants love nothing more than a sand bed to tunnel through. Here's how to win each fight.

**Weeds.** Weeds in brick joints are a symptom of open, dirt-filled joints — which means the joint sand is gone. Killing the weeds without refilling the joints is mowing the lawn without fixing the fence; they'll be back in weeks. The real fix: remove the weeds completely (roots and all — a weed torch or careful hand-pulling beats spraying, because herbicide residue can stain brick), clean the joints, and refill with fresh joint sand. Polymeric sand, which hardens when activated, resists weed growth far better than plain sand because there's nothing loose for seeds to root in. For maintenance between refills, a kettle of boiling water poured on young weeds kills them without chemicals, and doing it early — when they're seedlings — takes seconds.

**Moss and algae.** Green and black growth on brick means

persistent dampness and shade. It's slippery, it's ugly, and it holds moisture against the brick. The fix has two parts: kill what's there and fix the dampness. A stiff brush and a masonry-safe cleaner handle the growth — not bleach straight, which can discolor brick and kill everything downhill. The dampness fix is drainage and sun: trim back what's shading the patio, make sure water isn't standing, and check that irrigation isn't soaking it. Moss that keeps coming back is telling you about water, not about moss.

**Ants.** Ants tunnel through sand beds and pile the excavated sand on the patio surface — those little sand volcanoes in the joints. They're not just unsightly; they're undermining the bed under your bricks. Treat the colony, not the symptom: ant bait stations near the activity, not repellent sprays that just scatter them. After the colony is dead, refill the tunneled joints with sand. In Texas, fire ants add urgency — a patio full of fire ant mounds isn't a patio you can use. Treat fire ants with labeled fire ant bait, and keep kids and pets off until it's done working.

**The prevention routine:** full joints, good drainage, sun where possible, and a yearly pass with the weed torch and the broom. A patio with tight, full joints and no standing

water mostly defends itself. The living enemies exploit weakness — give them none.

## Chapter 8: Joint Sand — What Goes Between the Bricks and Why It Matters

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The stuff between your bricks is doing more work than you think. It locks the bricks together, keeps them from shifting, blocks weeds, and — critically — lets water drain through while keeping the base intact. Get the joint material wrong and the patio suffers.

**Plain sand** is the traditional fill: cheap, easy, drains well. Its weakness is that it washes out, blows out, and gives weeds and ants exactly what they want. Plain sand joints need topping up regularly — it's honest maintenance, but it's maintenance.

**Polymeric sand** is sand with polymer binders mixed in. You sweep it into the joints dry, compact, sweep again, and mist it with water. The polymers activate and the sand sets up — not hard like mortar, but firm and bound. It resists washout dramatically better than plain sand, blocks weeds far more effectively, and deters ants. It's the standard for sand-set patios now, and for good reason. The caveats: it must be installed on a dry patio with dry joints and activated exactly

per the product's instructions — too much water during activation causes hazing on the brick, too little leaves it weak. And it needs re-doing every several years as it breaks down, especially in Texas heat and UV. It's not permanent. Nothing in a joint is permanent.

**Stone dust and crusher fines** get used as joint fill by some installers. They compact hard and resist washout, but they can hold water against the brick and stain it, and they're brutal to remove when the patio needs relaying. I'm not a fan for residential patios.

**Mortar joints** belong to mortar-set patios — covered in Chapter 6. Don't mortar the joints of a sand-set patio. You'll lock a flexible system rigid, and the first soil movement will crack it. I've seen it done. It's always a mistake.

**Width matters.** Sand-set joints want to be tight — an eighth to a quarter inch. Wider joints wash out faster, grow more weeds, and let bricks shift. If your patio was laid with half-inch joints, that's part of why it's failing. When relaying, tighten them up.

The joint is the cheapest part of the patio and one of the most important. A \$30 bag of polymeric sand, installed right, does

more for a patio's life than almost anything else you can buy.

## Chapter 9: Edging — The Frame That Holds the Picture Together

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Every sand-set brick patio needs edge restraint, and a shocking number don't have it — or have it failing. The edging is what keeps the outer bricks from creeping outward under foot traffic and thermal movement. Without it, the patio loosens from the outside in: joints open at the perimeter, bricks shift, weeds move in, and the failure marches toward the middle.

**What good edging looks like:** a rigid restraint — steel, aluminum, or heavy plastic paver edging — spiked firmly into compacted ground along the entire perimeter, holding the outer bricks tight. Or a mortared soldier course — bricks set on end in concrete — which is the traditional masonry edge and looks beautiful. Or the patio butted against a concrete curb, foundation wall, or other fixed structure. What all good edging has in common: it's rigid, it's continuous, and it's anchored below frost-and-heave depth — which in Texas mostly means anchored below the zone of soil movement, well-spiked into solid ground.

**What failed edging looks like:** plastic edging heaved up by soil movement, spikes pulled loose, sections missing entirely, or the classic — no edging at all, just bricks ending at the grass. If your patio's perimeter bricks are creeping into the lawn, the edging has failed or was never there.

**The repair:** reset or replace the edging, spike it properly, and relay any perimeter bricks that have shifted. It's straightforward work and it's cheap relative to its importance. When I lift and relay a patio, the edging gets done as part of the job — relaying brick without fixing the edge is building a picture without a frame.

**The Texas note:** our clay soil heaves edging. Plastic edging spiked into expansive clay gets jacked up in wet seasons and doesn't always settle back. Deeper spikes, into stable soil below the active zone, and steel or aluminum edging that resists the heave, are worth the upgrade in Texas. The cheapest edging is the most expensive edging if you replace it twice.

## Chapter 10: Drainage — The Grade Your Patio Needs

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Water management decides whether your patio repair lasts thirty years or three. I've touched on drainage in several chapters; here it is in one place, because it's the thing homeowners control most and fix least.

**The patio's own slope.** A brick patio must slope away from the house — about a quarter inch per foot is the standard. That's enough to move water without feeling like a hill. A patio that slopes toward the house funnels every rain straight to the foundation and the back door. A patio with no slope — dead level — holds water in every low spot, and standing water breeds moss, undermines joints, and in a freeze, becomes an ice rink that works the bricks apart. When relaying, the slope gets built into the sand bed. When diagnosing, the slope (or lack of it) gets measured.

**The yard's slope.** The patio doesn't exist alone. If the yard slopes toward the patio, or if there's a swale directing the whole backyard's runoff across it, the patio is fighting water it was never designed to handle. The fix is grading — shaping

the yard so water flows around or past the patio, not through it — or a French drain intercepting the flow uphill. Grading is dirt work, not masonry, but it's masonry's best friend.

**Downspouts.** Every downspout near the patio should discharge away from it — extensions, buried drain pipe, something that carries roof water past the patio instead of onto it. A single downspout dumping a roof's worth of Texas thunderstorm onto a patio will wash out joints and undermine the base in a season. Walk your downspouts in a hard rain sometime. You'll learn things.

**Irrigation.** Sprinkler zones should water the grass, not the patio. Daily soaking keeps joints saturated, feeds moss and weeds, and in expansive soil, keeps one side of the patio's base swollen while the other dries. Adjust the heads. It's a screwdriver job.

**The base drains too.** A proper patio base — compacted crushed stone — drains. Water that gets through the joints hits the stone and moves through it instead of sitting under the bricks. This is another reason the base matters: it's not just structural, it's the patio's internal drainage. A patio on a proper stone base with good surface slope sheds water two ways. A patio on dirt holds it.

Get the water right and the patio mostly takes care of itself.  
Get it wrong and you're repairing on a loop.

## Chapter 11: Tree Roots vs. Brick — The Slow Heave

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Trees and brick patios are on a collision course wherever they meet, and in Texas — where the oaks and pecans are old, big, and thirsty — they meet a lot. A root growing under a patio doesn't push through the bricks. It lifts them, slowly, a fraction of an inch a year, until the patio has a ridge or a hump that trips feet and holds water.

**Diagnosis.** A root heave has a signature: a linear ridge or a localized hump, often with the high point tracking a line from the tree toward or under the patio. If you lift the bricks at the high point, you'll find the root — sometimes shockingly large — running through the base. Confirm before you cut: the ridge should point at a tree, and the root should be findable under the lifted bricks.

### **The repair options, honestly:**

- **Cut the root and relay.** For small roots, cutting the offending root, installing a root barrier, and relaying the patio works — if the root is minor and the tree has plenty of other roots. Cut cleanly, don't rip.

- **Bridge over it.** For larger roots you can't cut without harming the tree, the patio gets relayed with the base built up over the root — a gradual ramp rather than a sharp heave. It doesn't fix the root; it accommodates it. The root will keep growing, so this buys years, not decades.
- **Reroute the patio.** Sometimes the honest answer is that the patio and the tree can't share the space, and the patio's edge moves. Nobody likes this answer, but it's cheaper than relaying every five years.
- **Remove the tree.** The last resort. In Texas, with our heritage oaks, this is often not on the table emotionally or legally — many cities protect large trees. Check your local rules before anyone fires up a chainsaw.

**What not to do:** cut a major structural root of a mature tree to save a patio. You'll destabilize the tree — and a destabilized mature oak near a house is a far bigger problem than a heaved patio. And don't just relay over an active root without a barrier or a plan; you'll be lifting those same bricks again in three years.

**Prevention:** when building a new patio near trees, install root barrier — rigid panels buried vertically between the tree

and the patio, deep enough to deflect roots downward. It's cheap during construction and nearly impossible to add later without lifting the patio. If you're relaying anyway and there's a tree nearby, put the barrier in while the patio is up. Future you says thanks.

## Chapter 12: Walkways — The Same Rules on a Narrow Stage

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Everything in this book applies to brick walkways, with a few twists that come from being narrow, linear, and usually right against the house or leading to the front door — the most visible brick on the property.

**Brick walkway repair is patio repair in miniature.** Same base principles, same failure modes — poor compaction, water washout, clay heave, root lift, edge failure. The diagnosis walk is the same. Lift-and-relay is the same job, just narrower. Repointing costs run the same **\$3 to \$15 per square foot**. The one structural difference: walkways are often constrained on both sides — house on one side, edging or lawn on the other — which actually makes edge failure less common but makes relaying fussier, because there's no room to work around the edges.

**The front walk takes the most eyes.** Your walkway is the red carpet of your house — every visitor, every buyer, every appraiser walks it. A heaved, weed-choked front walk drags the whole house down. A crisp, level brick walk lifts it. Dollar

for dollar, walkway repair is some of the highest-return masonry work there is, because it's the first thing people touch.

**Trip hazards are liability, not just looks.** A heaved brick on a walkway — an inch or more of lip — is a trip hazard, and on a front walk it's your liability. This moves walkway repair from "someday" to "soon" in a way patio repair doesn't always. If someone's elderly or unsteady on their feet visits regularly, a heaved walk is a genuine safety issue. Fix the heave; it's a small relay job.

**Walkways and water.** The walk from the driveway to the front door often sits in the path of roof runoff — the roof valley dumps right where the walk meets the porch. Same drainage rules: slope away, intercept the water, don't let the downspout use your walk as a stream bed. And walkways against the house need the same quarter-inch-per-foot slope away from the foundation — toward the lawn, not toward the wall.

**Width and pattern.** When relaying a walkway, keep the width generous — four feet minimum for a front walk, so two people can walk side by side. And keep the pattern simple: running bond or basketweave reads classic and relays easily.

Intricate patterns look great in photos and cost more in labor every time they're touched.

The walkway is the handshake of your house. Make it firm and level.

## Chapter 13: When to Repair vs. When to Start Over

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Every patio reaches a fork: repair what you have, or tear it out and build new. Here's how to make the call honestly.

**Repair when:** the bricks are sound, the pattern is one you like, the patio's size and location still work, and the problem is the base or the joints — which is most of the time. Lift-and-relay with a proper new base gives you essentially a new patio wearing old brick, at a fraction of new-construction cost. Published 2026 data puts patio and paver repair at **\$7 to \$30 per square foot**; new brick paver installation runs **\$10 to \$17 per square foot** and up — and new construction on a failed site still needs the excavation and base work that the repair needs. If the brick is good, repairing is almost always the better value.

**Start over when:** the bricks are shot — widespread spalling, crumbling, freeze damage through the units. When the patio's size, shape, or location no longer works — too small, wrong place, fights the yard's drainage no matter what. When it's a mortar-set patio on a failed base — there's no

lifting mortared brick, so a failed mortar-set patio is a tear-out by definition. Or when you want a different material or a fundamentally different design — at that point you're not repairing, you're remodeling, and that's fine, just be honest that it's a choice, not a necessity.

**The math that matters.** Price the repair: lift, new base, relay, joints, edging. Price the replacement: tear-out and disposal, excavation, new base, new brick, joints, edging. On a patio with sound brick, the repair is usually 40 to 60 percent of the replacement — the brick itself, which you're reusing, is a big chunk of new-construction cost. On a patio with bad brick, the numbers converge, and new starts making sense.

**The trap to avoid:** the partial repair that ignores the base. "Just relay the sunken section" without fixing why it sank. "Just top up the sand" when the base has washed out. These are the repairs you pay for twice. Whatever you choose — repair or replace — the base gets built right, the drainage gets fixed, and the edging gets done. Those three are non-negotiable either way.

**The timeline question.** If you're selling in a year, a clean relay or even a thorough joint restoration may be all the patio needs — it photographs well and passes inspection. If

this is your forever home, build the base like it's forever. The extra gravel and compaction cost almost nothing in the context of the job and pay back for decades.

## Chapter 14: What Brick Patio and Walkway Repair Costs in 2026

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One place, all the numbers, all 2026 published ranges, all with the "depends on" attached.

**Repair work.** Paver and patio repair: **\$7 to \$30 per square foot**. That wide range is the base-work variable — a simple joint restoration sits at the bottom, a full lift-and-relay with excavation and a new compacted base sits at the top. Most real lift-and-relay jobs land in the middle of that range.

**Repointing.** Patio and walkway repointing: **\$3 to \$15 per square foot**, or **\$450 to \$2,000** for a typical 12-by-12 patio. Mortar-set patios, cut-and-repoint work. Joint sand restoration on sand-set patios runs less — it's cleaning and refilling, not cutting mortar.

**New installation, for comparison.** New brick paver patio installation: **\$10 to \$17 per square foot** in national 2026 data, with regional figures clustering **\$10 to \$14**. Dry-laid brick specifically: **\$18 to \$25 per square foot** in some markets. These matter because they set the ceiling — if a repair quote approaches new-installation cost, ask hard

questions about whether you're repairing or rebuilding.

### **What moves the number:**

- **How much base work.** This is the big one. Topping up joints: cheap. Lifting, excavating to solid soil, hauling in crushed stone, compacting in lifts: that's the money, and it's the part that makes the repair last.
- **Access.** A patio behind a house with no equipment access means everything by wheelbarrow — slower, pricier. A walkway along the front with truck access is faster.
- **Brick condition.** Sound brick gets reused. Badly spalled or broken brick needs replacement units, and matching old brick costs money — sometimes real money if it's an unusual unit.
- **Drainage fixes.** Regrading, French drains, downspout extensions, root barriers — these are separate line items that the patio repair often reveals as necessary. Budget for the possibility.
- **Size.** Small jobs cost more per square foot — mobilization is fixed. A 50-square-foot walkway section costs more per foot than a 500-square-foot patio, because the crew, the compactor, and the

material delivery cost the same either way.

**The bid-reading rules.** The bid should say: how many square feet are being lifted, how deep the excavation goes, what base material and how much, compaction method, joint material, edging scope, slope/drainage plan, and cleanup. A bid that says "fix patio — \$2,800" without those details is a guess with your money. Get three bids. The middle, interviewed, usually wins.

## Chapter 15: Hiring It Done Right

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Patio work sits in an awkward spot in the trades: landscapers do it, hardscapers do it, masons do it, and handymen do it. They're not interchangeable. Here's how to hire.

**Hire for the base, not the brick.** Laying brick in a pattern is the easy part — it's the visible 20 percent. The base is the invisible 80 percent that decides whether you're calling again in three years. When you interview contractors, spend most of your questions on the base: How deep do you excavate? What base material? How do you compact — and in what lifts? What's the slope? How do you handle the drainage? A contractor who lights up talking about base work is a contractor who builds patios that last. A contractor who waves it off and talks about patterns is selling you the pretty part.

**Ask to see a lifted patio.** Not a finished photo — anyone can photograph a finished patio on day one. Ask for an address of a patio he repaired three or more years ago, and go look at it. Is it still level? Are the joints still tight? Are the edges still in? A three-year-old repair tells you everything about the base

work. A day-one photo tells you nothing.

**The crew question.** Who's actually doing the work — his crew or a subcontracted crew? Both can be fine, but you should know. And who's supervising the base work? The base is where jobs are won or lost, and it should be supervised by someone who knows what he's looking at.

**Get the drainage in writing.** If the bid includes regrading, drain pipe, or downspout work, it should say so with specifics. If the patio needs drainage work and the bid doesn't mention it, that's a bid for a repair that will fail — the water that killed the last base is still there.

**Red flags.** The bid with no base specification. The contractor who says your sunken patio just needs more sand swept in — sand on top of a failed base is a temporary cosmetic. The price that's half the others — he's skipping excavation, compaction, or disposal, and you'll find out which when it sinks again. The cash deal with no paperwork. The guy who can start tomorrow — good patio contractors in season are booked out, because the work is weather-dependent and everybody wants it in spring.

If you want it done by people who do [brick patio and walkway repair] (<https://championbrickrepair.com>) as a core trade — base, drainage,

relay, repoint, the whole job — that's what we do. And if you're still learning, my [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) cover the rest of what your masonry is trying to tell you.

## Chapter 16: Keeping It Level — The Maintenance Routine

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A repaired patio isn't a finished patio — it's a patio with a fresh clock. Here's the routine that keeps it level for decades. None of this is hard. All of it is skipped.

**Yearly: the spring walk.** Every spring, walk the patio the way Chapter 4 taught you. Look for new low spots, rocking bricks, opening joints, edge creep. Catching a developing dip at a quarter inch is a small fix. Catching it at two inches is a relay. Fifteen minutes, once a year.

**Yearly: joint check and top-up.** Sweep the joints. If the sand is low — and it will be, a little, every year — top it up. A bag of joint sand and a broom, once a year, keeps the joints full and the weeds out. This is the single highest-return maintenance task on a sand-set patio.

**As needed: weed patrol.** Pull seedlings when they're small. A weed torch for the stubborn ones. Never let weeds establish deep roots in the joints — the roots open the joints and the cycle accelerates.

**As needed: drainage check.** After the first big spring storm, watch where the water goes. Downspout extensions still in place? Grading still sloping away? New low spot in the yard funneling water at the patio? Water patterns change as yards settle and landscaping grows. What drained fine three years ago might not today.

**Every few years: reseal the joints.** Polymeric sand breaks down — Texas UV and heat see to that. When the joints start loosening and the sand brushes out easily, it's time to clean and refill. Not a crisis, just the cycle. Budget for it the way you budget for exterior paint: periodic, predictable, cheap compared to the alternative.

**Ongoing: manage the trees.** Roots grow. If there's a tree near the patio, watch the high side — the side toward the tree — for the first sign of heave. A root barrier installed during a relay helps, but roots are persistent. Early detection means cutting one small root, not relaying the patio.

**Never: the pressure washer on full blast.** A pressure washer held close will blast joint sand out and undermine the bed — you'll clean the patio and ruin it in the same afternoon. If you pressure wash, keep the wand back, use a fan tip, keep the pressure moderate, and plan to refill joints

afterward. Or just use a hose, a brush, and a masonry cleaner. Slower, safer.

Do this routine and your patio's thirty-year clock runs full. Skip it and the clock runs fast. The patio doesn't ask much. Just don't ignore it.

## Chapter 17: Questions Homeowners Ask Me

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**My patio has a low spot that holds water. Can you just fill it?** You can, and it'll be back. A low spot means the base failed there — filling over it without fixing the base is cosmetic. The real fix is lifting the bricks in the low area, rebuilding the base, and relaying. I know it's more work. It's also the only fix that lasts.

**How long should a brick patio last?** The brick itself: 50 to 100 years, genuinely — brick doesn't wear out. The installation: decades on a proper base with maintenance, or a few years on a bad one. When someone asks about patio lifespan, they're really asking about base lifespan, and the answer is that a proper compacted stone base with good drainage lasts as long as the brick does.

**Can I relay my own patio?** A small area — a few square feet of rocking bricks, a minor dip — yes, if you're handy and patient. Lift the bricks, add and compact base material, screed the sand, relay, sweep joints. A whole patio — that's a crew job. The excavation, the material hauling, the compaction, the screeding over a large area: it's skilled,

physical work, and getting the slope wrong over 400 square feet is an expensive mistake. Know the difference between a repair and a project.

**What's better: brick or concrete pavers?** For patios, honestly, both work. Clay brick has the classic look and incredible longevity — century-old brick patios exist. Concrete pavers offer more shapes, colors, and patterns, and they're dimensionally consistent, which makes laying faster. Brick can spall in freeze-thaw if it's a soft unit; quality pavers are manufactured for the climate. Pick the look you want; build the base the same either way. The base doesn't care what sits on it.

**My contractor wants to pour concrete under the patio. Is that right?** For a mortar-set patio, yes — that's the system. For a sand-set patio, no — a concrete slab under sand-set brick traps water and defeats the flexibility that makes sand-set work. Make sure you and the contractor agree on which system you're building before anyone excavates.

**How do I stop weeds without chemicals?** Full, tight joints are the real answer — polymeric sand, topped up yearly. For existing weeds: pull them roots and all, or hit young ones with boiling water or a weed torch. Landscape fabric under

the patio doesn't stop weeds — they root in the joints from above, not from below. Save your money.

**The patio rocks in one spot but looks fine. Is it urgent?** Not urgent, but don't ignore it. Rocking bricks mean the bed has washed out or settled underneath. It's a small lift-and-patch now, or a bigger relay later when the rocking spreads and the joints open. Small now beats big later — that's the whole philosophy of patio maintenance.

**Should the patio slope away from the house even if it looks flat?** Yes. A quarter inch per foot, away from the house. Flat looks fine and ponds water. If your patio is dead level and holding water, that's a relay to correct the slope — or at minimum, a drainage solution for the standing areas.

**We're selling. Is patio repair worth it before listing?** A clean, level, weed-free patio photographs beautifully and reads as "maintained home" to buyers. A full relay before selling is usually overkill unless the patio is genuinely hazardous — a thorough cleaning, joint refill, weed removal, and edging tidy-up gets you most of the visual return for a fraction of the cost. Fix trip hazards regardless; they're a liability and an inspection flag.

**Can a sunken patio affect my foundation?** Indirectly, yes. A patio that slopes toward the house dumps water at the foundation, and in expansive clay soil, that concentrated water causes exactly the differential movement that cracks slabs. The patio-to-foundation water path is one of the most common preventable foundation stressors I see. Slope the patio away, extend the downspouts, and you've helped your foundation too.

## **A Final Word Before You Call**

Your patio is the most honest masonry on your property. Walls can hide their problems behind paint and landscaping. A patio shows you everything — every dip, every loose brick, every weed is the base telling you exactly what's happening underneath. Learn to read it and you'll never be surprised by it.

Walk it this spring. Chalk the low spots. Check the joints, the edges, the slope, the water. Then fix the base — not the symptom — and fix the water while you're at it. Do that, and the brick you relay today will still be level when your kids are arguing about who gets the house.

The ground moves. The brick doesn't have to.

## About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).