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# TERRACING

## What Is A Terrace?

Terraces are stair-stepped levels constructed on a steep slope. The steps may be used as a path or as small flower or vegetable gardens. Terracing makes planting a garden on steep slopes possible while also reducing erosion and improving infiltration of rainfall.

## Building a Terrace

The safest way to build a terrace is the cut and fill method. With this method, soil disturbance is minimized and little additional soil will be required.

1. Before beginning any project, check homeowner association covenants, as well as local and county ordinances. Do not work in a drainage, utility, or other easement without the proper permits. Also, call the Indiana Underground Plant Protection Service (1-800-382-5544) to identify the location of any buried utilities.
2. Determine the **rise** (vertical distance from the bottom of the slope to the top) and the **run** (horizontal distance between the top and the bottom) of your slope. This will help you determine the number of terraces needed.
3. Start building beds at the bottom of your slope. You will need to dig a trench (dimensions will vary) in which to place your first tier. Make sure the bottom of the trench is firmly packed and completely level.
4. For the sides of your terrace, dig a trench into the slope. The bottom of this trench must be level with the bottom of the first trench. When the depth of the trench is 1 inch greater than the thickness of your timber you have reached the back of the terrace and can stop digging.
5. Cut a timber to the correct length, place in trench, drill holes through your timbers and pound long spikes or pipes through the holes and into the ground.
6. Place the next tier of timbers on top of the first, overlapping corners and joints. Spike these together.
7. Move soil from the back of the bed to the front of the bed until the surface is level. Add another tier as needed.
8. The back of the last bed will be level with the front wall of that bed.
9. When finished, plant and mulch.

## Materials For Terracing

Numerous materials are available for building terraces. Treated wood is often used because it is easy to work with, blends well with plants, and is often less expensive than other materials. There are many types of treated wood on the market from railroad ties to landscaping timbers. These materials will last for years.

Other materials for terraces include bricks, rocks, concrete blocks, and similar masonry material. Most stone or masonry products tend to be more expensive than wood.



Photo Courtesy of Paul Nordmark

## Height of Walls

The steepness of the slope often dictates wall height. Make the terraces high enough so the land between them is fairly level. Be sure the terrace material is strong enough and anchored well enough to stay in place through freezing, thawing, and heavy rainstorms. Waterlogged soil behind a wall can exert enormous pressure and cause improperly constructed walls to bulge or collapse. Many communities have building codes for walls and terraces. Because of the expertise and equipment needed to build large terraces, restrict terraces you build yourself to no more than one or two feet high.

For more information or for guidance specific to your site, contact your local county Soil & Water Conservation District.