

Laying Stone



Thin joints are the strongest. When working with mortar, joints should be $\frac{1}{2}$ -1" thick. Mortar is not intended to create gaps between stones, but to fill the inevitable gaps and strengthen the bonds between stones. Wiggle a stone once it is in place to get it as close as possible to adjoining stones.



Blend large and small stones in walks or in vertical structures to achieve the most natural appearance. In addition to enhancing visual appeal, long stones in a walk act like the tie stones in a wall, adding strength by bonding with other stones.



Place uneven stone surfaces down and dig out the soil underneath until the stone lies flat. Use the same approach in the bottom course of a dry-laid wall, only make sure stones at the base of a wall slope toward the center of the trench (pages 188 to 189).

Natural stone is heavy material—about 165 lb./cubic foot on average. So, the first thing to remember when laying stone is to handle it with care so you avoid injury to yourself and others. The methods of laying stone are as varied as the stone masons who practice the craft. But all of them would agree on a few general principles:

- Thinner joints are stronger joints. Whether you are using mortar or dry-laying stone, the more contact between stones, the more resistance to any one stone dislodging.
- *Tie stones* are essential in vertical structures, such as walls or pillars. These long stones span at least two-thirds the width of the structure, tying together the shorter stones around them.
- When working with mortar, most stone masons point their joints deep for aesthetic reasons. The less mortar is visible, the more the stone itself is emphasized.
- Long vertical joints, or *head joints*, are weak spots in a wall. Close the vertical joints by overlapping them with stones in the next course, similar to a running bond pattern in a brick or block wall (page 65).
- The sides of a stone wall should have an inward slope (called *batter*) for maximum strength. This is especially important with dry-laid stone (page 89). Mortared walls need less batter.