How to Use Ready Mix Concrete for Patios, Paths and Bases

What Is Domestic Ready Mix Concrete and Why It Matters

For anyone planning a solid patio, a set of garden paths or a sturdy base for a shed or workshop, concrete is often the go-to material. But ordering concrete for a domestic job can feel intimidating, bags of dry mix from a builders merchant seem simpler, yet they demand serious labour and careful mixing to get consistent results. That is where domestic ready mix concrete comes in. It is concrete that arrives on site already mixed, poured straight from a truck into your prepared area. The idea is straightforward: you skip the bag mixing, the guesswork about water content and the risk of weak spots, and instead get a uniform material that sets hard and stays level.

Domestic ready mix concrete is not just for big construction sites. Smaller loads can be delivered to homes, and suppliers now offer grades that suit everything from a light-duty garden path to a load-bearing base for a car or a heavy shed. The key is understanding what you need, how the delivery works and what preparation the ground requires before any concrete arrives.

What Grades of Concrete Work for Patios, Paths and Bases

Concrete grade refers to the compressive strength of the cured material, measured in newtons per square millimetre. The most common domestic grades are C10, C20, C30 and C40. C10 is a lean mix used mainly for subfloors or as a blinding layer. For a patio or a footpath, C20 or C30 is typical, it provides enough strength to handle foot traffic, garden furniture and occasional loads like a wheelbarrow. For a base that will support a vehicle or a heavy shed, C30 or C40 gives better durability and resistance to cracking under weight.

Your choice of grade also depends on ground conditions. If the soil is stable and well-drained, a lower grade may be perfectly adequate. On soft or clay-heavy ground, a stronger mix combined with a thicker slab and reinforcement helps prevent long-term settlement. Many suppliers, including Stacey Concrete Ltd, offer a range of grades and can advise on what suits the job. The important thing is to match the concrete to the purpose, not to over-specify and waste money or under-specify and risk failure.

View the location on Google Maps

Preparation: The Groundwork That Makes the Difference

Ready mix concrete is only as good as the surface it sits on. Before any truck arrives, the area must be excavated to the correct depth. For a patio or path, that usually means removing around 150 to 200 mm of topsoil and soft material. For a base intended to take a vehicle, you may need to go deeper, up to 250 mm or more, to accommodate a subbase layer of compacted hardcore or type 1 stone.



The subbase serves several purposes. It distributes the load from the concrete slab into the ground below, reduces the risk of frost heave in winter and provides a stable platform that prevents the concrete from cracking as it cures. The subbase should be compacted in layers, typically 75 to 100 mm at a time, using a vibrating plate compactor. Once the subbase is level and firm, you lay a damp-proof membrane if the concrete will be in contact with a building, or simply a thin sand blinding layer to stop the wet concrete from running into the gaps in the stone.

Formwork and Reinforcement

To keep the concrete in shape while it sets, you need formwork, wooden boards or metal edging that defines the edges of the slab. The formwork must be held firmly in place with pegs, and the top edge set to the finished height of the concrete, accounting for a slight fall for drainage on patios and paths. A fall of about 1 in 80 (roughly 12 mm per metre) is enough to shed rainwater without making the surface feel uneven.

For most domestic slabs, reinforcement in the form of steel mesh or fibres is optional but recommended. Mesh helps hold the concrete together if the ground moves or if heavy loads are applied. Fibres, added to the mix by the supplier, reduce the risk of plastic shrinkage cracks during the first few hours after pouring. If you are pouring a large patio or a base for a heavy structure, talk to your supplier about adding fibres or ordering a mix with reinforcement fibres already included.

Ordering and Delivery

When you order domestic ready mix concrete, you give the supplier the volume you need, the grade and any special requirements such as fibres or a specific slump (the consistency of the fresh concrete). Volume is measured in cubic metres. For a patio 5 metres by 4 metres and 100 mm thick, you need 2 cubic metres (5 x 4 x 0.1 = 2). Always order a little extra to account for spillage and variations in depth, 10 to 15 percent is a sensible margin.

Delivery trucks can carry loads as small as half a cubic metre, though minimum order sizes vary. The truck mixes the concrete on the way to keep it fresh, and you have a limited window, usually one to two hours from batching, to place and finish the concrete before it starts to set. That means you need enough helpers on site to spread, level and tamp the concrete quickly. For a small job, two or three people can manage; for a larger pour, four or more may be needed.



Pouring, Levelling and Finishing

As the concrete flows from the truck chute into your prepared area, work it into corners and along the edges of the formwork using a shovel or a rake. Then use a straight board or a tamping beam to level the surface, moving it back and forth in a sawing motion to bring the aggregate down and the cream (fine cement paste) to the top. For a smooth finish, follow with a float, a steel or magnesium tool that closes the surface. If you want a non-slip texture, a soft broom drawn across the surface after floating leaves a fine grip pattern.

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Expansion joints are essential in any slab larger than about 3 metres in either direction. Concrete expands and contracts with temperature changes, and without joints it will crack. You can create expansion joints by placing a flexible strip (often a bitumen-impregnated fibreboard) across the slab at intervals, or by cutting a groove into the fresh concrete to a depth of about one quarter of the slab thickness. For paths, a joint every 2 to 3 metres is typical; for patios, plan joints that divide the area into roughly square sections.

Curing: The Step Most People Skip

Concrete gains strength through a chemical reaction that requires moisture. If the surface dries out too quickly, the outer layer becomes weak and may dust or crack. Curing means keeping the concrete damp for at least three to seven days after pouring. The simplest method is to cover the slab with plastic sheeting weighed down at the edges, or to spray it lightly with water and cover it with wet hessian. In hot or windy weather, curing is especially critical. Many a patio that looked perfect on day one has developed a network of fine cracks by week two simply because it was left to dry in the sun.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

The most frequent errors in domestic concrete work are poor ground preparation, ordering too little concrete and trying to finish the surface in conditions that are too hot, cold or windy. Ground that has not been properly compacted will settle under the slab, causing it to crack or sink. Ordering short by a few tenths of a cubic metre can leave you scrambling for bagged mix to patch the gap, a bodge that often shows. And finishing concrete in direct sunlight without shading or a slow-setting additive can make the surface crust over while the material underneath is still soft, leading to a rough, uneven finish.

Another overlooked detail is the need for a damp-proof membrane between the concrete and the ground if the slab is next to a house or a building. Moisture from the ground can travel through the concrete and into the building fabric, causing damp problems inside. A simple polythene sheet laid over the subbase prevents that.

Stacey Concrete Ltd, based at Ryder Point Works in Wirksworth, supplies ready mix concrete grades C10, C30, C40 and more across the East Midlands. Their team can talk through your project requirements and help you choose the right mix and volume. The key is to plan ahead, prepare the ground properly and have enough hands on site for the pour. With the right approach, domestic ready mix concrete delivers a durable, level surface that lasts for decades.

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