



Introduction

Also known as de-paving, ‘Tile Whipping’ removes hard-standing surfaces and replaces them with natural surfaces so rainwater can soak into the soil and ground to drain away, reducing flooding. The term comes from the Dutch word ‘tegelwhippen’, where they hold a national de-paving competition across the Netherlands to replace tiles with plants and wildlife.

Almost any tiles can be removed, but the easiest de-paving is done by removing tiles or paving bricks that you might have on your patio or drive, and the most difficult is removing tarmac.

If you are in Stroud or nearby, we are offering free collection of any hard material you remove as part of the 2026 ‘Tile Whipping’ campaign.

This offer is subject to availability and limited to areas of 2m². To sign up, visit our webpage: www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk/depaving. For full terms and conditions, visit www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk/depaving-terms-conditions.

To help you do some de-paving at home, we’ve created this in-depth guide on what to do.

Table of contents

Step 1 - Choose where to de-pave

Step 2 - Permissions

Step 3 - Utilities

Step 4 - Try removing a tile

Step 5 - Planning

Step 6 - Start de-paving!

Step 7 - Re-enforce the new edge

Step 8 - Excavating the ground for planting

Step 9 - What to do with the surfaces you’ve removed

Step 10 - Add soil

Step 11 - Plant it up!

Finished result

Fine print

Step 1 - Choose where to de-pave

Location – you might want to de-pave at home, at your community space, at your business, or a public space if you're from a council.

Distance – It's recommended to be at least 3 meters away from any building or other structures, including retaining walls, but this is up to your personal discretion.

Access – This is more important in public spaces, so buggies, prams, and wheelchairs can get through safely. It's usually recommended that 1.4m is left for access. If removing one off tiles or bricks then consider where these are removed for partially sighted people.

Recommended locations

- Around areas already de-paved, such as around trees in urban areas to help them grow.
- Around flower beds.
- Tiles or hard surfaces on your drive that are often underneath a vehicle.
- Areas around the base of boundary walls or fences.
- Unused areas.
- Around your garden shed.

Step 2 – Permissions

➡ If you own the land, then you can proceed as you please. Head to the next step.

➡ If you rent the property/land, you need to obtain written permission from the owner.

➡ If your location is in a public place, you need to find out who owns that piece of land, so they can give you written permission to do the work. This might be your local town council, borough or district council, or national highways.

Step 3 – Utilities

Once you have permission as needed, check what utilities are under the ground. This will show if there are any cables, wires, and other services that might get damaged from water ingress or might need to be accessed by a utility company at some point.

For example, your water company might need access to certain drains especially in shared areas.

At home, these should be in the housing documents in property searches. You will likely have these as a homeowner or ask your landlord. You can also register online at ['LSBUD'](#) to find these

maps and information.

In public spaces, whoever owns the land may have the utility and services information so ask them first. You can also register online at '[LSBUD](#)' to find these maps and information.

You can often de-pave around areas where services are present, so the area you de-pave may just need to be smaller or in a different shape to work around them.

Step 4 – Try removing a tile

1. Try removing one tile to see if it's concreted into the ground. You can use a crowbar, hammer, or wood to lever tiles (this is often easier on broken ones).
2. At any location, especially in public areas, use cones and barriers to make the area safe for others while you do this work.
3. You can see below that these tiles weren't concreted in but sat on sand and were compacted in using a herringbone pattern. Still dig down about 10-20cm to see if there are any other layers underneath.

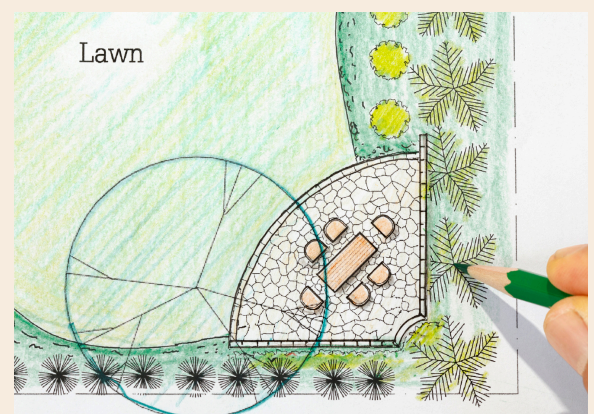


Step 5 - Planning

You can then decide with precision how many tiles or the size of the area you want to de-pave. You can also plan how you want the whole area to look. Factor in your utility searches here as they may limit where you de-pave. Sketching is a great way to visualise how you want it to look.

In our example, the area we de-paved was determined by the sign near the tree, public access around the area, and utilities under the ground nearby.

Consider proximity to building, intended use (if you want to plant the area up or use it as driveway), and how you will use the lifted tiles or tarmac (will you need to dispose of them or can you reuse them).



In our example, in Step 6, because there was a herringbone pattern, some of the uplifted bricks were reused to create straight boundary lines around the newly de-paved area to reinforce the edge.

Step 6 – Start de-paving!

- Now you know how much of the chosen location you want to de-pave and what you want it to look like, you can remove the hard surfaces in your defined area, and quite literally get cracking.
- If you're de-paving in a public area, whilst work takes place, you should use barriers to keep members of the public from entering the works area to keep it safe.



Step 7 – Reinforce the new edge

- It's good practice to reinforce the sides of large de-paved areas with wood, as the tiles aren't concreted in. With smaller areas like single paving slabs or block paving bricks, this isn't necessary as there isn't much weight within the area.
- In this example, the ground was sloped, so the borders were levelled to ensure the soil didn't easily shift down the gradient. This helps keep in the soil, bark, and plants that we'll add in later.
- Like in the example below, if you have small gaps left between your new boundary and the tiles or paving, you can fill these in with fine grit or gravel to make the area attractive and safe.



Step 8 – Excavating the ground for planting

For small areas, such as a couple of paving slabs, you can just put a thin layer of soil where the tile would have been and add small plants like creeping thyme or Mexican fleabane to fill the space.

For larger areas, you can dig out the topsoil and any other materials up to 0.5m if feasible. This will create a sunken flower bed.

Try and use any removed sand and soil while adding compost and any preferred growing medium ready for planting. Think about your preferred plants now to see what soil they like.

If there are no utilities or services present underneath or in proximity, you're at least 3 metres away from any buildings, and there's no concrete or impenetrable surfaces underneath; you can dig down as much as you would like. This would enable you to plant trees if you wanted, which take up lots of water, but be aware of roots and building foundations.





It's beneficial to dig out as much of the existing soil as you would like, depending on how much soil you want to put in, what you want to plant, and the type of soil that's already there.

Sand is good for drainage, so sand or loam-based soil will drain water well, but if you've got clay-like soil, you should dig more out, as clay doesn't drain quickly, or account for this with your planting. The more soil you can put on top of the clay will soak up more water.

Digging a few inches down shouldn't cause any issues, but it helps to know what's underneath. As mentioned, get service maps for the location to ensure you don't encounter associated issues.

Step 9 – What to do with the surfaces you've removed

Firstly, the best option is reuse or repurpose anything you've lifted.

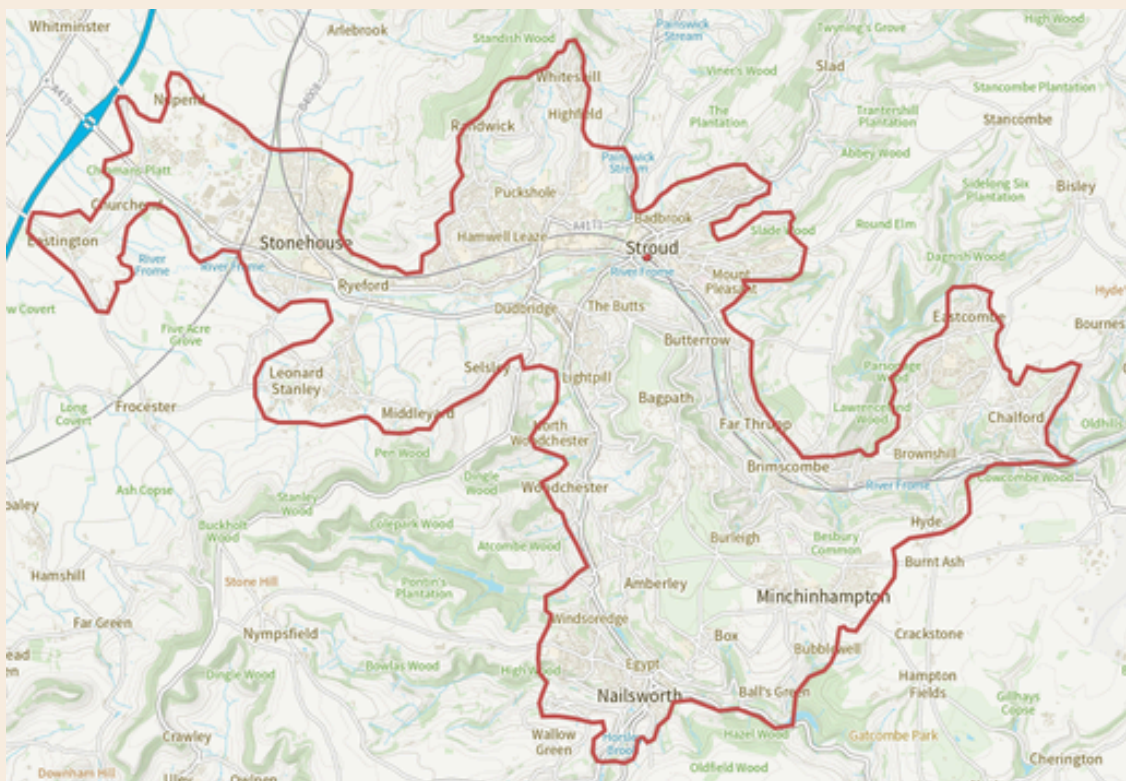
- You can use lifted bricks to make a BBQ stand, or flower bed, like this spiral herb garden.
- You can break up tiles to make edging for your borders and flower beds or make seating out of them.
- You could make a rockery out of broken pieces or concrete chunks – if placed in a specific way these can house toads and slow worms.



The second option is disposal

- **If you are in Stroud** or surrounding areas within the red outlined area on the map below, we are offering free collection of this material as part of the 2026 'Tile Whipping' campaign.

- To see if you are eligible for this free collection you must sign up on our webpage: www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk/depaving
- This is subject to availability and cannot be for more than 2m². For full terms and conditions, visit our webpage: www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk/depaving-terms-conditions.



- **If you are outside this area**, you can take your rubble to your local 'Household Recycling Centre' but you have to pre-book online at forms.gloucestershire.gov.uk/HRC_CarBooking (they may refuse you without booking).

Step 10 – Add soil

Once you're happy that you have enough depth and area to plant your chosen plants, you can use peat-free compost and any topsoil you prefer to fill your newly dug planting area.

Remember, it's recommended to reuse any soil or sand you dig up, mixing it with new compost to reuse old materials and keep costs down. If you have clay soil, reuse less and use more compost.

Most composts in garden centres will be loamy or well mixed so they will support plants and allow the drainage of water.



Step 11 – Plant it up!

You can now plant your newly composted area with an array of plants.

Plant up with species you like. Shallow areas should have shallow rooted plants; often these are smaller, shorter species. If planting trees, plant away from building, especially species with radial root systems as they can damage building foundations.

Check conditions: for what to plant, see how much sunlight the area gets. Check to see if it gets water draining into the newly de-paved area or if it's just natural rainfall it will receive. While native plants are best, you may need plants better adapted to wet conditions or drought tolerant.

You can plant low-maintenance plants if you would prefer not to have lots of extra gardening. Perennials will come back each year, so you won't need to plant the area again.

We always recommend native UK species, or non-invasive species, and plants that will support as much wildlife as possible, like pollinator-friendly plants. The [Royal Horticultural Society](#) and our [website](#) can provide plant species information.



Please turn over...

The finished result

This is the result of the example we've used throughout this guide. We finished ours off with bark chippings, which you can do if you like the look they create. Bark chippings can help retain moisture in the soil but might attract feline visitors.



It will take some time for your plants to establish and grow enough to become easily recognizable. You can buy more mature plants if you want to reach this stage quickly. Keep watering them for at least three months to ensure they bed in, after that you can care for them as described online or on care sheets.

Thank you for de-paving the way for wildlife

We hope this guide takes you through your de-paving journey, but if you have any additional questions, you can email us at info@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk using the subject 'Tile Whipping query' to ensure your query gets picked up by the relevant team.

Fine print

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This process has been created as part of Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's 'Tile Whipping' campaign in 2026 and may become outdated after this time.

All images are our own apart from the spiral herb garden photo, courtesy of the NK Tegelwippen website in the Netherlands.

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