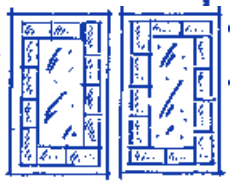
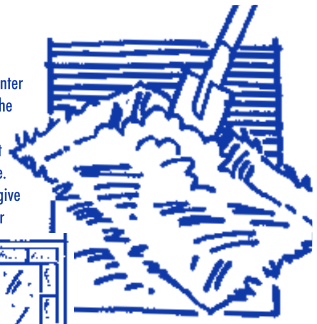
BUILD A CONCRETE SLAB

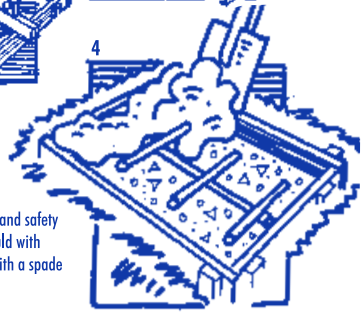
Give your garden a lift!
Take a look at your garden from a different perspective.
Having trouble growing your favourite plants and flowers?
A brick planter box is the answer and you can build-it-yourself. Follow a few simple tried and tested steps and you'll have a beautiful garden feature that will not only break up the symmetry of a flat boring garden but also enhance the value of your property. If you've ever thought about giving brick laying a go this is the perfect project to get started on.
It really isn't that hard.
Patience is a virtue!
HAPPY BUILDING!

STEP 1:
After selecting a suitable site, dig out a rectangular hole for your planter box foundation slab, making sure that the base is level. The size of the slab will be determined by the desired size of your planter box.
Hint: Your first attempt at building a planter box should be a modest one, not to big! Try using 4-5 bricks long x 3-4 bricks wide as a guide. Lay these out on the ground, leaving a 10mm mortar gap. This will give you the slab base size you will require, add 50 mm onto each side for good measure. See diagram 1.
When digging out your hole ensure you have allowed enough extra room to allow for the thickness of wood you are using to build your frame, to ensure you maintain the finished slab size you require.





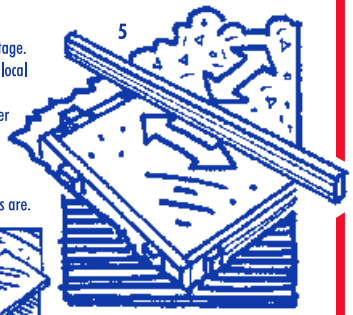
STEP 2:
Build a timber frame mould to suit the slab size required.
Use a smooth surfaced timber that doesn't warp when wet.
Ask your hardware supplier for a suitable timber and pre-made timber stakes. You'll need them to brace the outside of your timber frame. See diagram 2.
Your finished concrete slab should be a minimum of 100mm thick. 50mm below ground level and 50mm above. ie: you only need to dig to a depth of 50mm. This will ensure adequate planter box water drainage and healthier plants.
Make sure your finished height is level on all sides.
Use a spirit level for this task.
See diagram 3.



STEP 3:
Gently soak the excavated slab site with water, and let it stand for 30 minutes. This stops the soil from drawing water out of the fresh concrete and weakening it.

STEP 4:
Prepare your Australian Builders Concrete according to user and safety instructions on packaging. When ready, only half fill the mould with concrete (that's about 50mm). Level concrete out roughly with a spade or shovel. See diagram 4.

STEP 5:
Add steel reinforcement rods into your concrete mix at this stage.
Hint: Think ahead! Pre-prepare items required to complete this stage. You can purchase steel concrete reinforcement products from your local steel supplier. Get them cut to size, save yourself the trouble.
If you're using our guide template, you'll need one 10mm diameter steel reinforcement rod cut to the longest dimension of your slab mould and three more for the width. See diagram 4.
Hint: When in doubt consult your steel retailer, they're the experts and can calculate exactly what you need and what your options are.



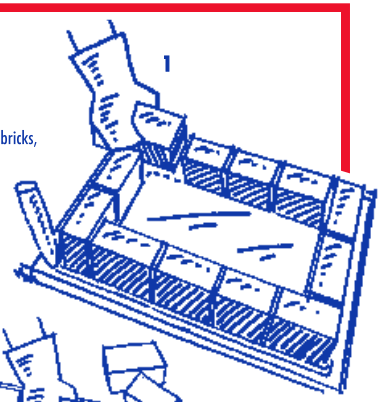
STEP 6:
Finish filling the timber frame mould. Slightly over fill, then with a straight flat length of timber level the surface.
Hint: Ensure the timber is wider than the frame width, to enable the sawing action required to work the excess concrete from back to front. See diagram 5.
Smooth finish the concrete slab surface using a wooden float trowel. No need for the perfect finish, no one will ever see, but it makes a good place to practice the art. Remember, practice makes perfect!

Important:
For best results, allow the slab to cure for at least two days, preferably 7 days. During this time protect the slab against weather and water evaporation by covering it with a plastic sheet, damp paper or hessian cloth.

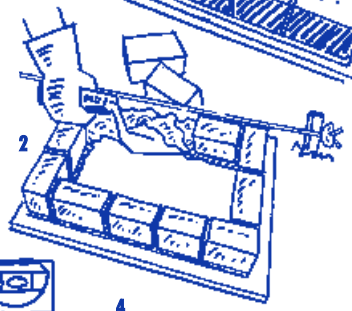
LAYING BRICKS

There's nothing more rewarding than building-it-yourself.
Brick Laying is great fun!
Remember the golden rule of B.I.Y. "Never bite off more than you can chew".
Work at your own pace, not the clock. At the end of the day a straight wall is what you want. Bad workmanship is un forgiving.
Hint: Build a straight timber guide on each corner of your planter box. This will ensure your walls will go up straight. Remove when finished. See diagram 10.
A string line and level will ensure brick courses stay level.
HAPPY BUILDING!

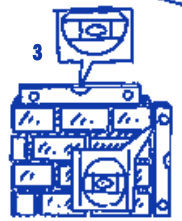
STEP 1:
The walls of this planter box will be one brick (or course) thick.
Start off with a mortar-free practice run, using the first course of bricks, to mark out the finished size. To do this take 12 bricks and place them directly on the hardened slab. Make sure there is a gap of 10mm between each brick, and that they are all straight and square. See diagram 1. With a piece of chalk or marker pen, mark around the outside and inside of brick course. Once marked remove the bricks to reveal only the marked area. This will be our guide for laying the first course of brickwork.



STEP 2:
Let the fun begin! Mix up a batch of Australian Builders Mortar according to user and safety directions on packaging, Apply enough mortar with your brickies trowel between the chalk markings on slab surface to lay 2-3 bricks at a time, to a thickness of no more than 10mm.
Hint: Why not add some colour to the job.
Australian Builders Colouring Agent or Oxides can create some added character to your finished project with a minimum of fuss. You will not be disappointed.



STEP 3:
Lay your first course of bricks directly onto this mortar, as you did in the dry run. For this first layer though, do not place any mortar between the bricks. Leave 10mm vertical joints free of mortar. These gaps will serve as the planter boxes drainage holes. Using the spirit level, check that these bricks are level and of equal height. See diagram 2 & 3.

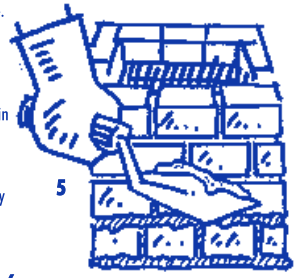


STEP 4:
Lay the second course. This time you must:
Alter the configuration of the bricks, so they overlap for strength. See diagram 4.
also adding mortar into the vertical gaps between the bricks for all remaining brick courses. Continue laying the brick courses (one through to seven), alternating the brick configuration each time. See diagram 4.

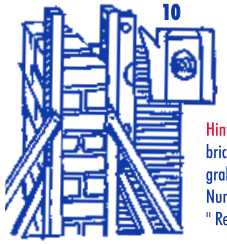
Brick Layout for Rows 1,3,5,7

Brick Layout for Rows 2,4,6

STEP 5:
Once you've completed the brickwork, clean off the excess mortar with your trowel. You should now leave the whole planter box under the cover of a damp cloth or a sheet of plastic for a few days to make certain it completely cures before you begin to use it. See diagram 5 & 9.



STEP 6:
You can waterproof your finished planter box by fixing some heavy duty plastic sheeting to the inside of the walls or painting the inside surface with creosote or other damp proofing product.
Hint: Give your new brick planter box a touch of class by cementing some decorative topping bricks or fixing some weather resistant timber edging boards to the last course of bricks you put down. See diagram 6 & 8.



Hint: For some great tips on brickwork joint finishes grab a copy of project sheet Number 4.
" Repointing Brickwork ".