

Landscaping foundation

Gravel, rocks and boulders

BY SARA MATTHIS

In the Keys, there's an environmental need for what's called a "pervious surface." That's just a fancy name for a rocky or grassy surface that can soak up the water from one of the frequent island monsoons. Water that soaks into the ground outside, won't come inside.

Beyond that, there's a practical need for rock in Keys gardens. It inhibits weed growth in our tropical and fecund environment. And, a smooth-ish surface can open up the possibilities for a particular space — a small patio to fit table and chairs, a place to park the car, or just a delineation between flower beds. Plus, it

can be very pretty.

In the Keys, the most popular type of "white rock" originates from lime rock, according to Barbara Hewlett of Mid Keys Sand and Rock in Marathon. It sells big and small loads, will help homeowners estimate and even offers a spreading service.

"Our trucks can carry up to 22 tons of product and we sell it by the cubic yard," Hewlett said. "But some of our customers don't need that much so they call ahead and come by in their trucks and we give them a 'scoop' of material."

PEA ROCK

(\$45 to \$55 a yard)

This is the small white rock. It's inexpensive enough to cover wide swaths in the front or back yards to cut down on yard maintenance. "It's easy to walk on, but too small for driveways," Hewlett said.

DIRT

(\$45 to \$55 a yard)

In the Keys, homeowners prefer a 50-50 mix of sand and soil. The sand helps retain moisture so sod, for example, can have a good start. Some homeowners use it to give their plot of flat land a dimension, with palm trees planted on small hills or mounds for interest.

RIVER ROCK

(\$125-150 yard)

Similar to Chattahoochee rock, river rock is slightly larger. "It comes in various shades of white, yellow, light brown and dark brown," Hewlett said.

Here are the best sellers:



BOULDERS

Big rocks make a nice focal spot in any Keys yard. Placed at the corner of a home, edge of dock or next to the main stairs, it signals a transition from one area of the home to another. Hewlett said they are available in all sizes to meet any budget.

57 ROCK OR ¾ ROCK

(\$45 to \$55 a yard)

This is like pea rock, only larger. It's best suited for driveways because it doesn't compact as easily.

CHATTAHOOCHEE ROCK

(\$125-150 yard)

This landscaping material is made of small, rounded pebbles. "People use it around their garden plantings," Hewlett said. "It helps prevent weed growth and makes a nice contrast with the greenery," Hewlett said.

CALCULATE IT:

Of course, sand and rock wholesalers are happy to estimate a job. But for the DIY-ers, there's an app for that. On the iTunes App store or Google Play store, users can download a construction materials calculator. Users estimate the length, width and depth of the project, the material needed, and a calculation pops up. For example, it tells me I need 22 yards of sand to cover my long driveway.

