

Mix, pour, impress your own snazzy garden stepping stones

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Stepping stones are attractive plus they're very handy in the yard and garden. But some of the more creative designs are expensive . . .

unless you make them yourself. It's really easy. You can use the concrete mix that you only have to add water to. Your mold can be any shallow container, even a garbage-can lid. Since removing the mold

can be difficult, it should be made from something that can be pliable or removable. Set the form down on a level surface and pour your mixed concrete in. To decorate it, press shells, rocks or other objects

into the surface before the concrete has had a chance to set up. These objects can be removed to leave an impression or left in the concrete permanently. That's really all there is to it. Once the concrete has set up, remove the mold and set your stepping stone aside to cure in a warm, damp spot for a few days.

Dear Carrells: It's always good to recycle things that you have a lot of. Finding new uses for old stuff can be fun. We go through lots of plastic jars of coffee creamer around our house. I've found these to be great storage containers for nails. I usually buy nails in a box or bag that doesn't last very long, so I transfer the nails into one of these jars. You can tape one of the nails on the front or top of the jar so you will know what's inside. These jars are just perfect because they are

plastic and won't break, and they hold a lot of hardware. — **B.S.**

A super hint: If you've got a nice table for your router or one of your saws, why not make it even better by putting castors on it? Locking castors will be safe, and you can roll the tool out to where it is easier to use.

Dear Al: In our new home, the builder put the washer and dryer connections in a closet in our adjoining bathroom. I thought it would be great until the first night I tried to go to sleep while my sneakers were drying. The next morning I found a good way to muffle that sound. I installed weather-stripping around the closet door and put a rubber mat under both machines. It has really made a big difference. — **C.R.**

Q: Our countertops are very old, and the previous owner of our

home used to smoke. There are some cigarette burns on the countertop that I would like to remove. It is man-made marble material. What will work? — **V.T.**

A: Try making a paste of cream of tartar and hydrogen peroxide. Place some of the paste over the stains, and let it sit for a while. Hopefully it will bleach them out. That's really about the only thing you can do. Good luck.

Shoptalk: Crystal Clear Alex Plus Caulk feels like silicone, but it really is latex caulk. That means it cleans up much easier and doesn't have a strong odor. It's strong, watertight and is perfectly clear. Look for it at just about any hardware store, home center or paint store. For more information, contact Dap Inc., 2400 Boston St., Suite 200, Baltimore, Md., 21224 or at www.dap.com. ■