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Product Profile: Stabilizer Solutions

As the 30th anniversary of Stabilized Decomposed Granite and Crushed Stone approaches, the groundbreaking idea is more relevant than ever.

From Europe's Tuileries and Stowe Landscape Gardens to the American gardens of Florence Yoch, natural materials such as crushed stone and decomposed granite were the paving materials of choice for some of history's greatest gardens and landscapes.

These timeless materials were recognized early on as the ideal way to connect pathway travelers to the surrounding landscape. Seventeenth-century English historical figure Samuel Pepys designated English gravel walks as the best paths in the world. Many experts attribute this to the fact that these aggregates are local to the area, providing not only a natural aesthetic but the almost living sound and texture of the gravel underfoot. Gordon Hayward, author of *Garden Paths*, writes, "Gravel or crushed stone usually comes from the area where you live, so there is a quality about the material that feels right."

Despite the benefits that this early green infrastructure provided to humans and the landscape, new modern standards for use and accessibility called for replacing these natural materials with concrete and asphalt. In the mid-20th century, pedestrian usability moved to the forefront of landscape design. However, rigid pavement increasingly distanced the pathway traveler from the natural surroundings, especially in the desert Southwest. While asphalt paths inherently felt out of place winding between centuries-old Saguaros, the heat retained in the pavement made it difficult for people to enjoy the desert in warmer months. In the early 1980s, a new way for landscape architects to use natural materials emerged from the Sonoran Desert—Stabilized Decomposed Granite.

While supplying seed for Lady Bird Johnson's Highway Beautification Project, native seed collectors Jon and Jim Hubbs discovered the unique properties that the seed of a certain desert plant displayed. After a heavy rain, the seed was tacky, like a natural glue. The brothers ground the seed into a fine powder and blended it with decomposed granite for erosion control. The decomposed granite was stable—it remained bound together under wind, water, and traffic. While many attempts had been made in the past to turn crushed stone and decomposed granite into pavement by adding cement or bituminous binders, this was

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different. This was natural and sustainable. The mixture of the seed powder and other natural ingredients was the first organic, 100 percent natural soil binder patented, known as Stabilizer®.



Around the desert Southwest, Stabilizer® and decomposed granite offered the first natural alternative to concrete and asphalt. Using local materials, Stabilizer® and decomposed granite replaced the asphalt paths that seemed out of place at the Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden more than 20 years ago. Later, in the early 1990s, Jones Studio identified the environmental benefits of the renewable binder and incorporated Stabilizer® into the driveway of the internationally recognized APS Environmental Showcase House, a forward-looking demonstration on the benefits of sustainable design. As landscape architects used Stabilizer® to drive public acceptance of the natural pathway as

an alternative to asphalt and concrete, the market as a whole became coined “Stabilized Decomposed Granite” after the natural soil binder.

Iconic Landscapes

During the 1990s, the idea of protecting the timeless feeling of the natural pavement spread to America’s most iconic landscapes. Arguably the country’s most recognized green space, New York City’s Central Park, incorporated Stabilized Crushed Stone into some of its few unpaved pathways. Installed at the Merchant’s Gate entrance to the park at Columbus Circle, the natural material withstands freeze–thaw cycles and the legions of bikes and pedestrians in the nation’s busiest city. In the late 1990s, landscape architects Carol R. Johnson Associates set out to make another national landmark, Paul Revere’s Ride, accessible to all Americans. In 1999, the Battle Road Trail and parking lots spanning Minute Man National Historic Park in Massachusetts earned the firm the “Honor Award” for Accessible Design in Public Architecture by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



Lincoln Center

In the new millennium, designers are using the age-old minerals to provide a modern take on

the great gardens of old in new urban settings. New York's Lincoln Center set out to add needed green space and additional gathering places. Diller Scofidio + Renfro, with FXFOWLE Architects and Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects, incorporated Stabilized Crushed Stone into Barclays Capital Grove, an elevated plaza with rows of trees and chairs that offers an oasis from the insistent streets. This addition provides the performing arts center new programming opportunities to reach a broader audience in a more natural setting. At the Art Institute of Chicago's new Modern Wing by Renzo Piano, landscape architects Gustafson Guthrie Nichol Ltd used Stabilized Crushed Stone to create a seating area of contemporary serenity in the Margot and Thomas Pritzker Pavilion. The Modern Wing has since earned a LEED Silver rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

The Sustainable Pavement

While midcentury standards for accessibility are continually being improved, new modern standards for sustainability are emerging at the forefront of design. In 2009, ASLA Honor Award-winning project the Biodesign Institute at Arizona State University became the first LEED Platinum-certified project in the state of Arizona. Ten Eyck Landscape Architects used Stabilized Decomposed Granite in a plaza area that doubles as a retention basin, playing a critical role in the water harvesting system. Christy Ten Eyck and her team created a revolutionary water conservation system by harvesting the building's condensate and directing roof stormwater runoff into the permeable Stabilized Decomposed Granite retention basin, bypassing the usual water routes that lead directly to the sewer system and to evaporation.

In 2010, centuries after the construction of Europe's Tuileries and Stowe Landscape Gardens, natural paving materials are still proudly being used just like in the epic gardens of old. Stabilized Decomposed Granite and Crushed Stone have helped to protect timeless pathways by meeting modern standards for accessibility. Almost 30 years after the creation of Stabilized Decomposed Granite, new standards for sustainability are proving that the idea is more relevant now than ever.

For more information about Stabilized Decomposed Granite, visit

www.stabilizersolutions.com.