



How to Lay Concrete

Concrete starts to harden and set about two hours after it has been mixed, so it must be laid, tamped (packed down) and given its finish within that time. Divide large areas into bays or sections which can be completed one at a time before they begin to set. You can walk on the concrete after three days and remove the formwork after five days (but as always, check any product instructions for the mix you are using as there are rapid setting options available).

Step 1

Mix the concrete.

Either mix using one part cement to five parts ballast or use a pre-mixed alternative. If using a pre-mixed one, add the amount of water instructed on the packaging.

How much concrete is needed?

To estimate the amount of concrete required for the shed base, calculate the surface area of the site by multiplying the length by the width (in metres). Multiply that figure by the depth or thickness required (as a fraction of a metre) and you will have the volume in cubic metres.

In practice, figures are rounded up and add about 10% for wastage.



Step 2

Wet the sub-base and the formwork with a watering can fitted with a rose.



Step 3

Starting in one corner, pour concrete onto the formwork.



Step 4

Push the blade of the shovel up and down in the wet concrete (particularly near the edges) to get rid of any air pockets.



Step 5

Use a rake or shovel to spread the concrete, leaving it about 18mm higher than the top of the formwork.

Fill about 1 to 1.5m from the end where you started.



Step 6

With a helper, compact the concrete using a straight piece of 50 by 100mm timber that's longer than the width of your site (this is known as a tamping board).

Start at one end and use steady blows of the plank, moving it along the site at a rate of about half its thickness at a time, until you have an even ridged surface.



Step 7

To remove excess concrete and level the surface, go back to the end where you started and slide the tamping board backwards and forwards in a sawing motion across the site, moving it all the time away from the starting edge.

Fill any depressions in the surface and repeat the procedure, if necessary, until you have an even surface flush with the top of your formwork.

Continue to pour the concrete, tamp and level until you reach the end of the bay.



Step 8

At this stage you have a rough tamped surface which can be left as is or given any other finish as required.

When you're happy with the finish, run an edging trowel along the formwork to round off the exposed edges of the concrete to prevent chipping.



Step 9

Cover the concrete with a polythene sheet to slow drying and prevent cracking.

Raise the sheet on wooden supports so that it does not touch the surface and weigh it down with bricks around the edges.

Let the concrete set completely before installing your shed and remove the formwork with the help of a crowbar.