

# Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC

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## GETTING A PERMANENT LABYRINTH

by Robert Ferre, master labyrinth builder

I receive many requests for information from people who are considering getting a labyrinth but don't know where to start. This quick summary is meant to help you the process.

### COST

The first question is often cost. Can we afford to do this? The cost range of labyrinths depends on the surface. My website gives a rough idea at [www.labyrinth-enterprises.com/pricerange.html](http://www.labyrinth-enterprises.com/pricerange.html). You can make your own labyrinth for next to nothing, by painting it on the ground, putting engineer's flags into the grass, laying out some stones, or mowing it into the grass. Our website includes free instructions on how to lay out a labyrinth. This article will not address do-it-yourself options. Rather, it is directed to institutions or labyrinth committees who are quite certain that they will need to engage a professional person to help with design, consulting, and installation. These are expressly the services offered by my company, Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC. Examples of finished projects are available in the Our Work section of our website ([www.labyrinth-enterprises.com/ourwork.html](http://www.labyrinth-enterprises.com/ourwork.html)).

The typical installation has two kinds of expenses: hard costs and soft costs. Hard costs are the estimates shown below, which is our fixed fee structure for installing labyrinths. If you are engaging our services, to the costs shown below you will need to add the soft costs, which include travel to the site, lodging, and meals. This varies considerably from job to job depending on the circumstances. Before we do an installation we have a written agreement that shows the hard cost and a reasonable estimate of the soft costs, so there will be no misunderstanding.

### SOFT SURFACES

The first great cost consideration is the nature of the walking path. Soft surfaces, such as grass or mulch, are usually within the realm of doing it yourself. On some occasions one of our crew has gone to the site to instruct volunteers in how to do the work. However, most institutions who are providing a public labyrinth want hard surfaces which are durable and easy to maintain. As a result, we usually work with concrete or pavers. Below is a quick description of what we could do with regards to soft surfaces.

#### **Grass and brick**

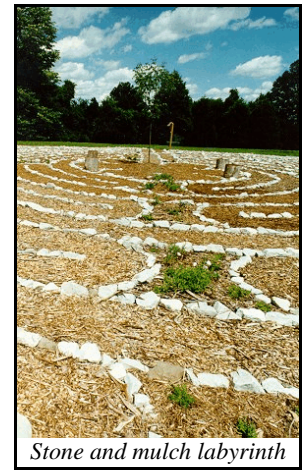
A few years ago, I painted a labyrinth (50-foot Chartres pattern) on the grass at a private residence. My fee and travel came to around \$1,500, as I took only one day to do the work. Then volunteers dug out the lines and placed bricks in their stead, flush with the ground – so the mower would pass over them. It was quite labor intensive and took several weekends. They used 2,000 bricks, which could cost \$1,500 or so. The labyrinth cost \$3,000 and is still there, years later, being happily used.

#### **Turf labyrinths**

Turf labyrinths are three-dimensional, as either the path or line is dug out and piled to form a henge (a bit like a berm). In some cases you walk in the low area and the line is the mound. In other cases you walk on the mound and the valley is the line. We don't do this kind of work. For more information, see the website of our colleague Alex Champion at [www.earthsymbols.com](http://www.earthsymbols.com).

## Stones and mulch

In this instance, landscape cloth is spread on the labyrinth site to hinder the growth of weeds. The labyrinth pattern can be drawn in chalk on the cloth, after which time volunteers place rocks on the lines and fill the paths with mulch. We did this at Silver Bay, on Lake George, NY, with volunteers, taking a day and a half to complete the project.



*Stone and mulch labyrinth*

## Soft surfaces

- Pro: Within reach of most people, inexpensive, do it yourself  
Con: Not usable all year (in northern climates with snow), can be mushy in rainy weather, not accessible to wheelchairs  
Maintenance: Must trim regularly during growing season to keep grass from growing over the bricks

## **HARD SURFACES**

Surfaces such as concrete and pavers (which are bricks, made of concrete rather than clay) have the greatest versatility and durability, making them the best choice for public labyrinths.

## Concrete

Our specialty is polymer concrete, an overlay material commonly used in the decorative concrete field. Traditionally, to make designs on concrete, the decorative concrete industry has utilized sand blasting, stencils, and staining to achieve its effects. Typically, these are done indoors, protected from sun and weather. Outdoor projects tend to be limited to stamping the concrete to look like stone, or using stencil techniques to look like brick or tile. Swimming pool surrounds and driveways or sidewalks were the usual recipients of such treatments. For a horror story of one dissatisfied customer who bought a stained labyrinth, see our website at: [www.labyrinth-enterprises.com](http://www.labyrinth-enterprises.com).

In concrete school, I learned about tools, materials, and construction. Seeing a need, I developed our proprietary polymer concrete techniques to replace paint or stain. The polymer in polymer concrete is like glue, designed to bond to underlying concrete, mainly for re-surfacing or decorative purposes. We use it to color the lines in the labyrinth pattern. The underlying concrete is already poured, finished, and cured for at least a month prior to our arrival. That work is done by a local contractor, for whom we provide some guidelines. We then come to the site and install the labyrinth pattern. There are two ways of doing this.

One very striking method is to actually score the pattern into the concrete using diamond bladed tools (controlled by devices that we have invented) and then apply the polymer concrete by hand (using paint brushes). This has a striking look, as the cuts make it appear that the pattern has been inlaid into the concrete, even though it is really on the surface. Depending on the pattern and the size, our fee for this method ranges from \$15,000 to \$30,000. To this, add the cost of the concrete pad. A rough rule of thumb for a Chartres pattern is that the concrete plus the labyrinth installation total around \$1,000 per foot of diameter. So a 42-foot labyrinth would end up costing around \$42,000. This figure reduces to \$10,000 to \$20,000 for less complex patterns.



*Scoring the concrete.*



*Polymer concrete labyrinth*

A second method of making a polymer concrete labyrinth is to mask off the pattern and then apply the polymer concrete. This does not involve scoring the pattern into the concrete. The above technique has an almost three-dimensional feel, as the cut lines give depth. A masked pattern is flatter looking, more like a painting. Masking rather than scoring the pattern into the concrete takes less time, saving in both the installation fee (\$10,000 to \$20,000) and the soft costs (fewer meals, nights of lodging, etc.) We can use this technique for making custom designs which would be difficult to cut into the concrete.

## **Granite**

We've only done one granite labyrinth, which was far into six figures. Now, however, we have just added another possibility to our materials, namely, powdered granite in an acrylic resin base. The pattern is masked off, as with the second option above, in order to apply the material. The color is the natural color of the granite. There is no pigment, so not only is it unlikely to wear out, it will also never fade. The cost is about the same, \$10,000 to \$20,000. This also can be used to resurface the entire area, as when using older existing concrete for the base. Colors are more limited than with polymer concrete.

## **Pavers**

Pavers look like bricks, but are made from concrete. Making labyrinths from bricks can be difficult, depending on the design. The key to success is craftsmanship, especially regarding the quality of the base. A hand-cut Chartres labyrinth can cost into six figures. By using water-jet technology to cut some of the more complicated details, the cost can be cut in half. So paver labyrinths tend to cost in the \$40,000 to \$65,000 range. Unlike the concrete labyrinths, which require the client to put in the concrete, paver installations are complete, including the base.

There are a couple of sources for pre-cut labyrinth kits made of pavers. They come on pallets with written instructions. The purveyors of such products suggest that your local landscape company can do the installation. Our experience is that inexperienced installers leave a lot to be desired. Although professionals cost more, in the long run, the value and quality are there. If you must buy a kit, consider having a professional install it.



## **Hard surfaces**

Pro: Extremely durable and long-lasting. Use year around. Wheelchair accessible.

Con: Highly labor intensive, which is reflected in the cost

Maintenance: Can be re-sealed every three to five years, which takes a few hours and costs a few hundred dollars.

# **INTERMEDIATE SURFACES**

## **Crushed Stone**

Crushed stone is different from gravel. The latter is comprised of pieces of stone that are approximately the same size. Crushed stone ranges from 3/4-inch down to powder. As a result, when it is compacted, the small pieces nestle in between the larger pieces, forming a hard surface. This is how a base is done for paver labyrinths. You often see compacted crush stone in state parks and other places that need inexpensive but weather-proof walkways. It is usually grayish in color, and gritty to walk on. This can be used for making labyrinths at less cost than hard surfaces. It isn't very suitable near buildings, however, where the stone dust will be tracked into the building on people's shoes.

## **Grass Paving**

Grass paving utilizes a system of plastic grids to hold the soil, allowing the grass to grow above the grid and look like a normal lawn. The difference is that the grid prevents the ground from getting soggy, and provides a flat, hard surface that passes ADA standards for wheelchairs. By cutting the grids and replacing the lines of the labyrinth pattern with pavers, the end result looks like a soft-surface, natural, paver and grass labyrinth, but is far more durable. Cost is generally in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 range. Patterns are limited to circles and turns, as details such as are found on the Chartres labyrinth are too difficult to do. Grass paving can be installed on a compacted base, which raises the cost, or, if the soil is stable, can just be put directly on the ground, with an inch of sand under it. Tools required are much less involved or technical.

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Now that you have some idea of the possibilities and costs, what next? We can help you by email, telephone, postal mail, or by coming in person to evaluate the site. The first 10 minutes are free. After that, we charge \$90 per hour. We can get a lot done in an hour or two. When coming on site, the fee is \$900 per day plus expenses.

### Design

Traditional designs are attractive because they extend back for hundreds and even thousands of years. Such designs allow us to share a common experience with those who have gone before. In some cases, however, people want to be unique, or have special situations with regard to the site or the use. Contemporary designs and custom-made patterns may be appropriate in these instances. Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC, offers design services for both contemporary and traditional patterns. We also look at existing plans to make any suggestions that may help the project.

### Consulting

For the modest cost of an hour or two of consulting, or even a site visit, a client may benefit from our 11 years of experience as labyrinth makers. We often work with church committees, labyrinth projects, architects, landscape architects, or institutions who want to have a labyrinth, but are unfamiliar with the process or designs. When we are on site, I often talk to committees or staff members or even give a lecture to the general public – not only to inform them about labyrinths, but to build interest in getting (and funding) a labyrinth. We can also talk with architects regarding the specifications for the type of work they are considering. When it is time to do the concrete work, we have several pages of guidelines for the contractor. We can also supervise the work of volunteers for a do-it-yourself project.



*Masked polymer concrete labyrinth.*

### Installation

Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC, offers on-site installation of labyrinths utilizing a wide range of materials, including all of the ones discussed in this article. We are the only installers to have our own crews, available nation wide. In some instances we engage the services of outside colleagues who have specialized skills. We are labyrinth artists, as opposed to contractors, even though we often work on construction sites. Our staff has the skill and knowledge to design and build the perfect labyrinth for your situation.

## FUND-RAISING

### Donors

Sometimes people tell us they are raising money, and will proceed with planning for their labyrinth as soon as the coffers are full. In our experience, we find the opposite approach more effective. Make a plan for your labyrinth, complete with design, materials, cost, and attractive drawings. Commit yourself to getting a labyrinth, and then seek the funding. Having a specific plan generates more interest and greater passion. In many cases, a donor steps forward to make the labyrinth a memorial for a loved one.

### Grants

Grants come in many shapes and sizes. Some church denominations offer grants to individual churches. Non-profit foundations support the work of hospitals, often with a name like Friends of the Hospital. Certain regional foundations fund projects only in their areas. (The TKF Foundation in Baltimore or the Lilly Foundation in Indianapolis come to mind as examples.) Arts councils and other organizations fund public works, such as labyrinths in parks. We don't have a specific list of sources (the Internet is likely the place for that), but we do know that many labyrinths have been funded by obtaining grants. We can sometimes help enhance the grant application with information and photos.

## **Engraved Bricks**

Selling engraved bricks has been a means for raising a considerable amount of funds for labyrinths. The pavers can line the sidewalks or make a perimeter around the labyrinth or be put into a wall. In only once instance do I know of a labyrinth in which the lines of the pattern were engraved bricks, with mixed results. However, they sold 700 pavers at \$50 each, raising \$35,000 towards the labyrinth construction. The bricks can be sold throughout the community if the labyrinth will be open to all. Organizations as well as individuals can buy them. The inscription doesn't have to be a memorial, it can be a favorite verse, a pithy saying, or anything else.

## **THE PROCESS**

Here is a brief summary of the seven steps for getting a labyrinth.

- Form a committee or gather together interested people who can help carry out the process and share the vision with others. These could be the people who will subsequently use the labyrinth, care for it, and instruct others. It is this group that will carry out the process for getting a labyrinth.
- Examine the site as to the possibilities and limitations.
- Look at other installations (for example, in the Our Work section of the Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC, website), and determine a pattern. Or, engage someone to design your own pattern. Keep in mind that there are important principles of symbolism and meaning – it's not just a matter of making a meandering path.
- Engage architects, contractors, or other professionals, as needed.
- Bring together the context (potential uses), the site, the medium, and the amenities. This will allow you to make a plan or drawing and establish a budget.
- Conduct your fund-raising or obtain a donation or grant. In some cases, people buy a canvas portable labyrinth to use for a year or two to demonstrate the benefits of having a labyrinth while preparing to build a permanent one.
- Call Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC, for help during any of these stages, and for labyrinth installation services.



*Robert painting a labyrinth*

## **Labyrinth Enterprises, LLC**

Founded in 1995 as the St. Louis Labyrinth Project, we have hand-made more than 1,000 labyrinths. For making portable canvas labyrinths we have an 8,000-sq.-ft. studio in Saint Louis, the only studio of its kind in the world. For permanent on-site installations, we have more than a dozen experienced labyrinth artists ready to drive our truck and trailer to your site to produce a unique work of art using our proprietary tools and techniques. No one else offers our level of skill, experience, or expertise.

Please note our extensive website at:  
[www.labyrinth-enterprises.com](http://www.labyrinth-enterprises.com).



*Hospital atrium labyrinth*

We welcome your comments and suggestions on how to improve this article. Please contact Robert Ferré at (800) 873-9873 or [robert@labyrinth-enterprises.com](mailto:robert@labyrinth-enterprises.com). Thanks.