

Caring For Your Landscape: Efflorescence

When it comes to efflorescence, you likely fall into one of two camps. Either you've noticed patches of white on your patio pavers or retaining wall, or you're looking to protect your hardscapes before those salty deposits develop. Either way, it's helpful to understand the process before taking steps to alleviate the symptoms.

Understanding Efflorescence

Spots of discoloration on concrete or masonry are called "efflorescence," but the term also refers to the natural process that creates it. When water passes through porous bricks or pavers, it can leave behind deposits of water-soluble salts, which form a white (or gray, or green) coating. For efflorescence to occur, water must contain or pick up salt compounds, then pass through a porous surface and evaporate. Fortunately, there are multiple ways to interrupt this process, regardless of the current state of your patio or brickwork.

Why Efflorescence Is Not Warrantied

Homeowners should be aware that the handling of hardscaping materials prior to installation can play an important role in the development of efflorescence. Proper handling cannot guarantee against it, but mishandling or poor installation can contribute to its development. At NOVA, we take all practical steps to minimize the exposure of materials to moisture and soil while they are in our possession, and we only work with trusted suppliers who deliver consistent quality.

When efflorescence does appear on the hardscapes we build, the moisture and salts required to create this problem are most likely being contributed by the local environment. The presence of water and minerals can be impacted by soil composition, drainage, humidity, wind, patio usage, and the movement of groundwater. Due to the many variables at play, most of which are out of our control, efflorescence is not covered by NOVA or manufacturer warranties. There are, however, steps you can take to control it.

Prevention

Working with a reputable, professional contractor and choosing high quality materials will set the stage for preventing efflorescence. The best way to short-circuit this process, however, is to seal your masonry or pavers to eliminate water penetration after all materials have fully cured. If your hardscaping is new, or you've never experienced efflorescence, you'll simply need to decide whether you want a glossy sheen or a more natural, matte, look. Then find a penetrating or non-penetrating sealer that's compatible with your construction materials. Ensure that the materials to be treated are clean and dry before application, and plan to apply sealer every 3-5 years.

How to Remove Efflorescence

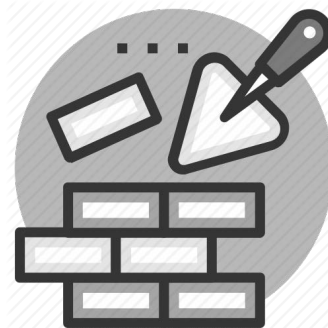
If your outdoor space is already taking on an unwanted sheen, sealing your concrete or masonry will prevent efflorescence from reappearing – but you'll have to remove the existing deposits first. If you are able to identify the salts, a little research will lead you to the ideal removal method. If the minerals cannot be identified, the first step is to try removing them with a dry brush. Hand washing with a mild detergent and a stiff bristle brush may also be sufficient.

If these gentle removal methods are not effective, pressure-washing, sandblasting, and chemical cleaners (some even labeled "efflorescence cleaner") should be considered. These removal methods, while often very effective, can make construction materials even more vulnerable to moisture penetration. Each of these options should be followed by an application of compatible sealant once visible salts have been minimized. While there is no foolproof method for efflorescence removal, one of these methods will reliably minimize its presence.

How To Prevent and Remove Efflorescence



Efflorescence is a crystalline or powdery deposit of salts visible on the surface of concrete, brick, stucco, or natural stone surfaces.



NOVA 
Landscape & Design

17720 Washington Street
Dumfries, Virginia 22026
(703) 382-6000