



INSTALLATION GUIDE



RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL | STEPS | RAISED PATIOS | WALKWAYS

U-Core
structural fill



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Installation Details

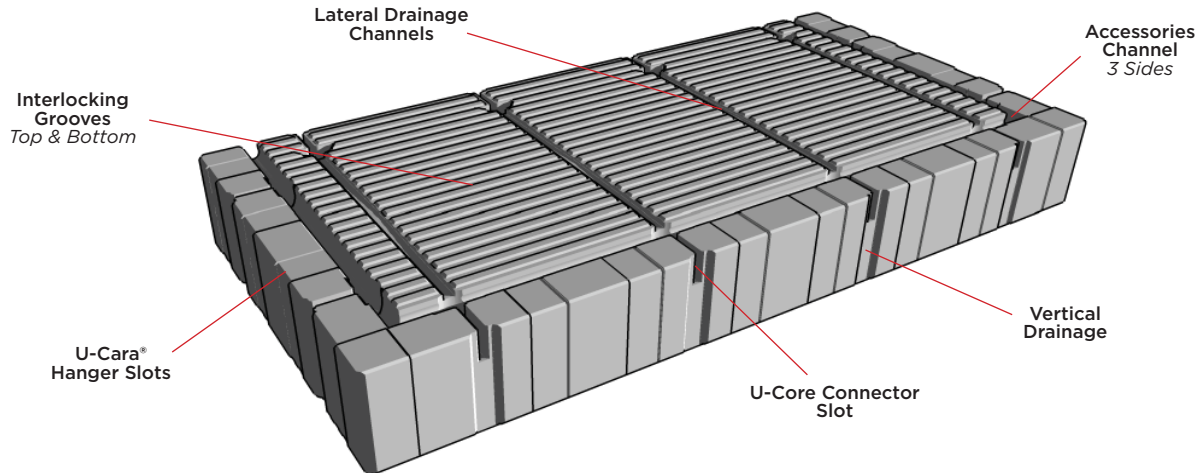
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U-CORE™ STRUCTURAL FILL

U-Core® is a patented, lightweight Geof foam block engineered to replace traditional gravel backfill in landscaping applications like raised patios, steps, and walkways. Designed to integrate seamlessly with Risi Stone® and Unilock® wall systems, U-Core delivers superior structural performance with less effort, reduced equipment requirements, and faster installation. Created with Civil Engineering Grade Geof foam, a material trusted worldwide in heavy construction for decades, U-Core delivers exceptional strength-to-weight ratio, durability, and effective frost insulation.

Unlike traditional gravel, U-Core is easy to transport, store, and install, especially in tight-access or urban areas. It reduces the need for heavy machinery, decreases the risk of soil settlement, and requires no compaction. The results are cleaner sites, faster builds, lower labor costs, and a smaller carbon footprint. U-Core is more than a backfill—it's a smarter, more efficient way to build.

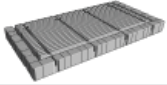
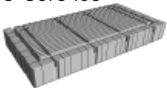



- FAST AND EASY INSTALLATION**
U-Core Connectors allow units to lock together quickly, forming a stable structure in just minutes.
- IDEAL SOLUTION FOR TIGHT ACCESS AREAS**
Perfect for locations where transporting aggregate-moving equipment and tools is difficult.
- LESS GRAVEL DUST AND CLEANUP**
Cleaner job sites with minimal mess, making cleanup faster and easier.
- REDUCE LABOR FATIGUE**
Move the same amount of fill with less effort. Easier handling means less strain on your crew.
- MINIMIZE EQUIPMENT WEAR**
Cut down on machinery use for transporting, spreading, and compacting gravel. Less wear, lower maintenance.
- LOWER CARBON FOOTPRINT**
U-Core requires five to seven times fewer truckloads than gravel—helping reduce emissions and environmental impact.



FEATURES & ADVANTAGES

The U-core system has a number of features that make it unique. They have been developed to enable a faster and more accurate installation by the contractor and to provide a stronger and longer lasting structure for the owner.

Feature	Advantage
Speed & Ease of Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save time and labour, particularly in hard to access sites
Reduce Wear & Tear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly reduce labour fatigue. Same amount of fill, a lot less work • Greatly decrease wear on machines typical to transporting, spreading, and compacting gravel backfills
Significantly Reduce Weight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the weight of structures and settlement potential • Eliminate lateral earth pressure when building steps/raised patios adjacent to existing structures (houses, etc.)
Increased performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better performance in areas traditionally prone to movement/settlement over time, such as Step Construction • Provides insulation to the subgrade and reduces potential for frost action in prone areas/soils
Reduced Impact During Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less space required on residential streets for Gravel storage, Eliminating by-law issues & traffic/lane obstructions • Decrease gravel dust, mess, and clean up after the Project
Smaller Carbon Footprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated 5-7 times truck loads of gravel to deliver same volume of U-Core • Reduced use of machinery, save on fuel

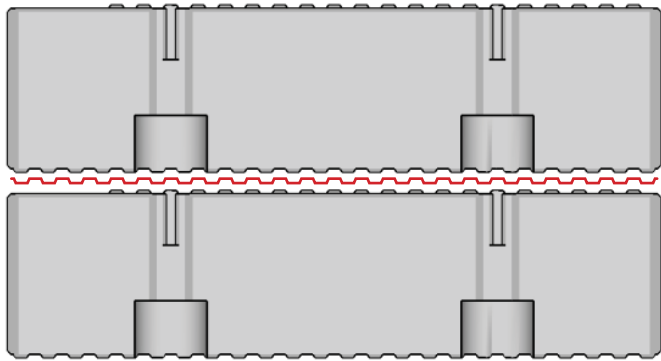
U-Core Blocks	Height	Width	Depth
 <p>U-Core 100</p>	3.9" 10cm	47.25" 120cm	23.5" 60cm
 <p>U-Core 150</p>	5.9" 15cm	47.25" 120cm	23.5" 60cm
 <p>U-Core 170</p>	6.7" 17cm	47.25" 120cm	23.5" 60cm
 <p>U-Core 180</p>	7" 18cm	47.25" 120cm	23.5" 60cm
 <p>U-Core 185</p>	7.25" 18.5cm	47.25" 120cm	23.5" 60cm

PRODUCT LIMITATIONS

U-Core Geofoam blocks are susceptible to damage upon contact with the following substances: hydrocarbons (oil, gas, diesel), chlorinated hydrocarbons, organic solvents (e.g., paint thinner), concentrated acids, and vegetable oils. Standard paver or concrete adhesives are prohibited; only PL Foam Adhesive is approved for bonding. Use exclusively Unilock approved water-based paver sealers and cleaners. The EPS beads comprising the Geofoam are combustible when exposed to intense or sustained heat sources.

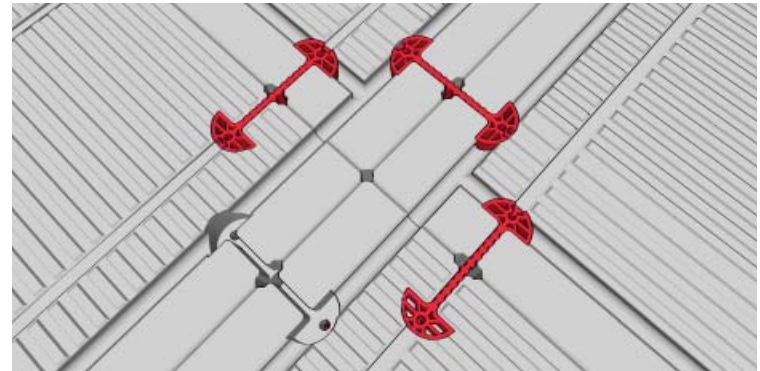
As a closed-cell product, U-Core Geofoam does not absorb water and is buoyant. **Do not use U-Core in areas subject to high groundwater levels or floodplains.**

FEATURES & ADVANTAGES



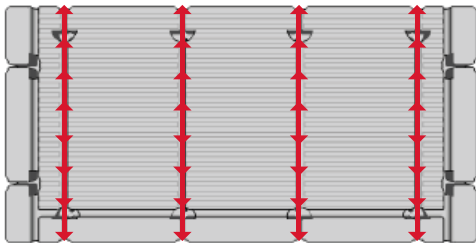
1 INTEGRAL INTERLOCKING RIDGES

Integral Ridges allow the units to securely interlock vertically. The ridge spacing allows the U-Core units to be stacked vertically or offset by increments of 25mm (1") to set the units back for steps or battered walls.



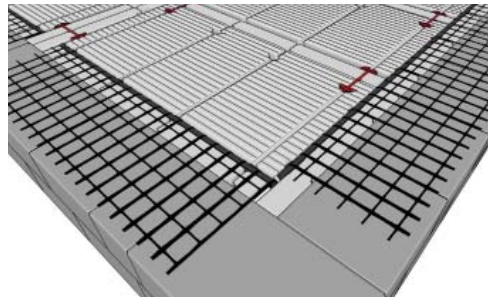
2 U-CORE CONNECTOR

The patented U-Core Connector locks the units together to create a solid "raft", ensuring alignment during construction, and significantly aiding in the distribution of loads throughout the life of the structure. Refer to page 21 for correct connector placement.



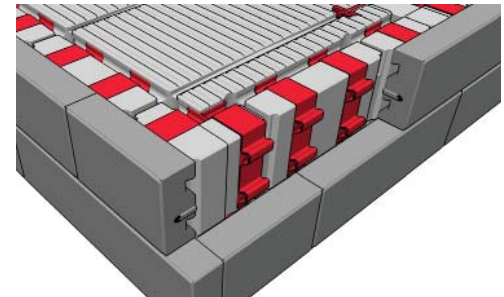
3 DRAINAGE CHANNELS

U-Core has been designed to allow water to be directed and removed through a series of channels and vertical drainage holes.



4 GEOGRID CONNECTION SYSTEM

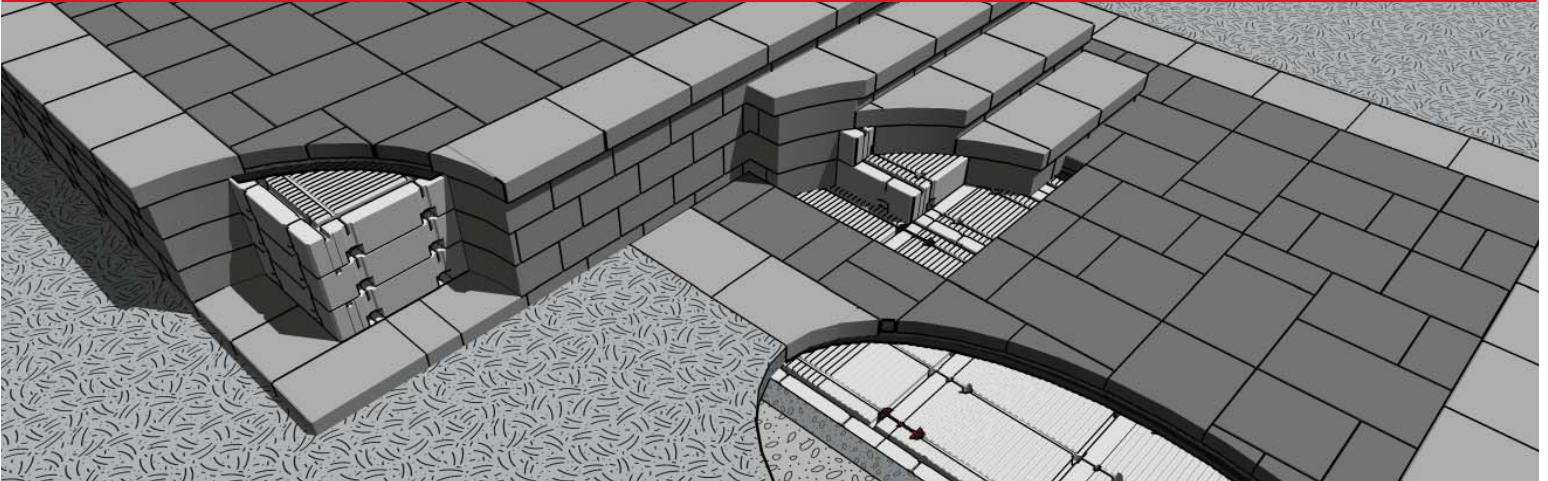
The semi-circular Accessories Channels on 3 sides of the U-Core unit allow for the integration of a 1/2" PVC pipe to lock Geogrid Reinforcement into place for use with higher walls. See page 24 Geogrid Reinforcement Installation.



5 U-CARA® HANGER

The U-Core system has been designed to incorporate U-Cara Fascia Panels with a patented Hanger. Easily incorporate the U-Cara system into raised patios, outdoor seating, pool bars and more. Refer to page 26 U-Cara Panel Installation.

APPLICATIONS



U-Core provides a fast, efficient way to place large volumes of structurally stable fill in Steps, Raised Patios, Walkways and more. Even if significant fill volumes are not required, such as in walkways and ground level patios, it can be utilized to speed up installation and reduce settlement issues. U-Core can reduce vertical and lateral loads by up to 90%, resulting in a low impact installation to the adjacent structures and in-situ fill material.

With U-Core, steps and stairs can be constructed with greater efficiency, while significantly reducing the potential for short and long-term settlement issues. Once the base is prepared, U-Core is designed to efficiently replace all the backfilling, compacting, and base leveling required in traditional step construction.

U-Core Structural Fill reduces or eliminates the following issues typically found in step and patio construction:

IMPROPER COMPACTION

Due to the infill zone in step construction being a small, confined space, it's difficult to use machine compactors. The result is installers using hand-tampers or less effective methods. This lack of proper compaction leads to local settlement of the infill gravel over time, causing misalignment, sloping of treads and safety issues. Steps installed with U-Core drastically reduce construction time and eliminate compaction issues.

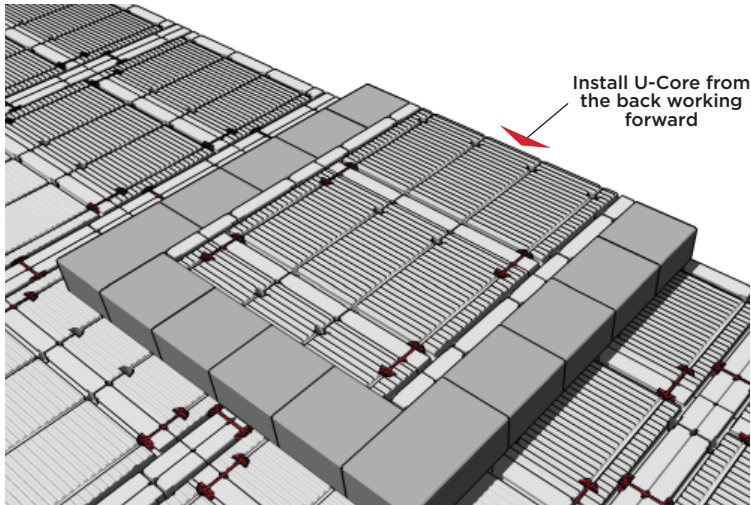
SETTLEMENT NEAR STRUCTURES

The infill material around typical residential structures is often poor quality and not properly compacted, consisting of loose back fill, organics, and garbage left over from construction. The added weight and vertical load resulting from construction of steps, raised patios and walkways often results in settlement of the original fill material, causing parts of, or the entire structure to shift. U-Core significantly reduces the weight and spreads to load over a wider area, reducing the impact on the original fill material.

REDUCED LATERAL EARTH PRESSURE

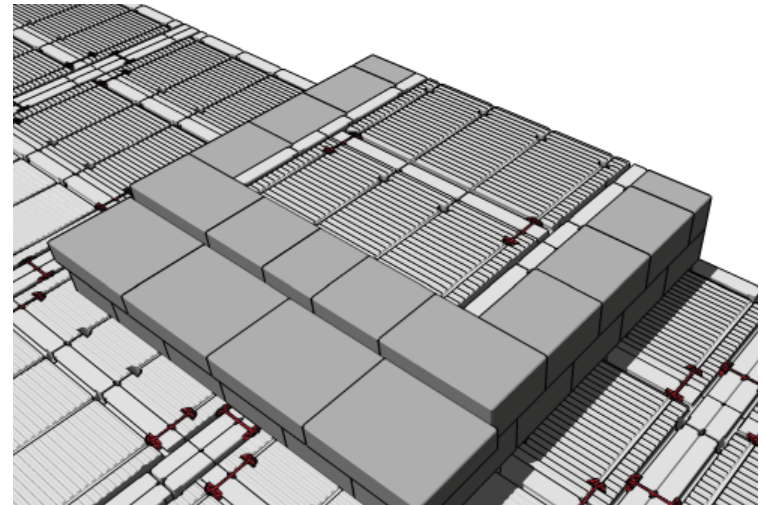
In addition to vertical loads caused from the construction of steps and raised patios, the gravel fill adds significant lateral earth pressure on nearby structures, and foundation walls. U-Core reduces lateral earth, removing future problems with existing structures.

STEPS & STAIRS



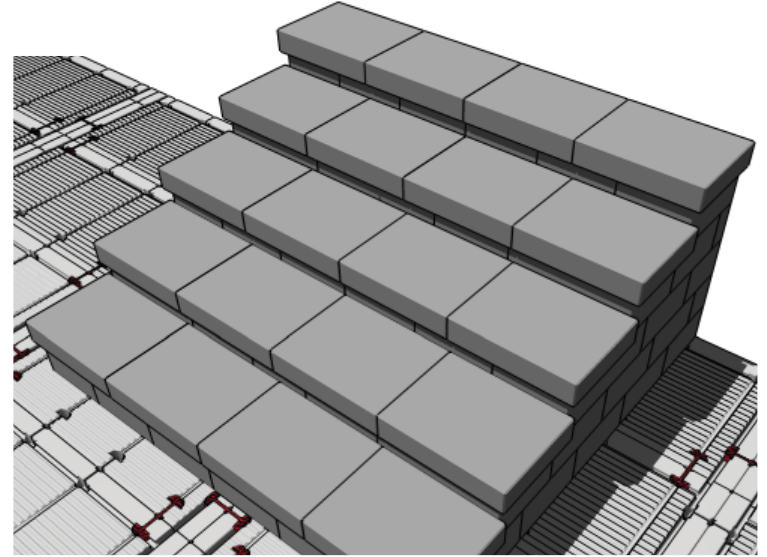
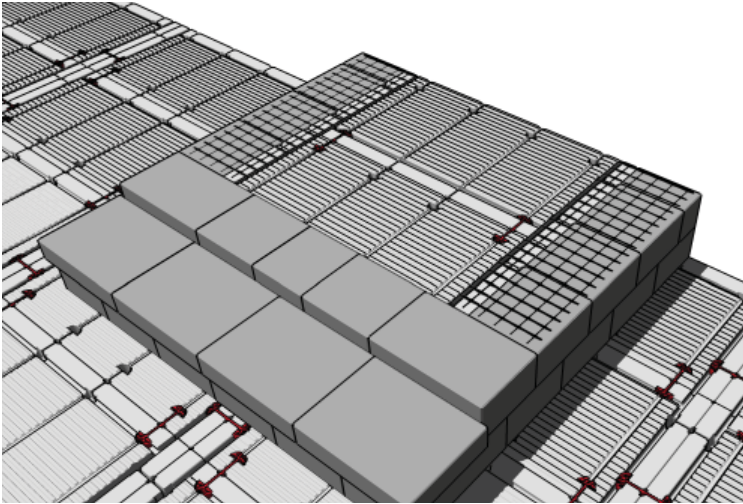
1 FIRST STEP

Choose the proper U-Core unit based on the wall block height, using the Product Specific Cross-Sections (page 12). Construct the step sidewalls and riser directly on a layer of U-Core or a gravel base. Start installing U-Core from the back and work forward out from the wall. Cut the U-Core to size using a Sawzall Reciprocating Saw if required.



2 SECOND STEP

Install the coping for the step tread and secure with approved foam adhesive. Continue to build the second riser/sidewalls and install U-Core in the infill zone, working forward out from the wall. Ensure the U-Core is placed so that there is an Accessories Channel along each sidewall, cut U-Core units to fit if required.



3 GEOGRID INSTALLATION

For added stability on the second layer, geogrid should be installed into the sidewalls. Ensure the U-Core is placed so that there is an Accessories Channel along each sidewall. Refer to Geogrid Reinforcement Installation instruction (page 24).

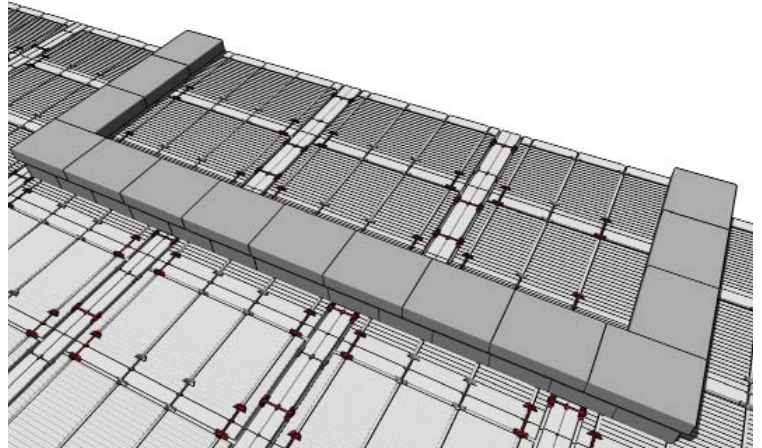
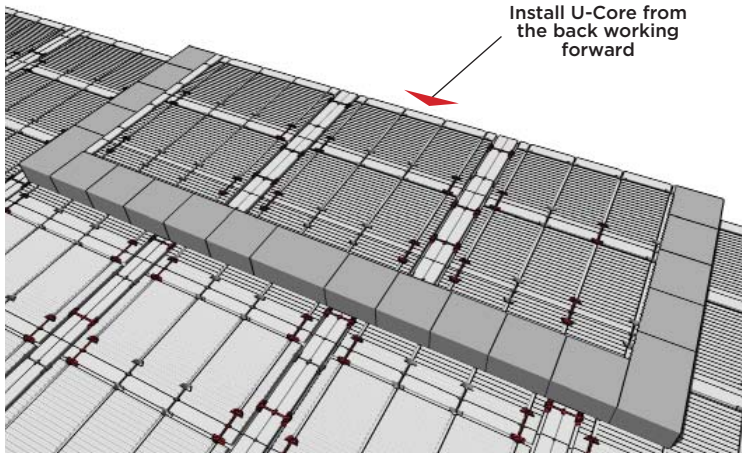
For higher stairs, geogrid should be installed at second and then every successive 3rd U-Core layer. Refer to Engineered Detail for incorporation of handrails & guards.

4 REPEAT

Continue building up the steps using U-Core in the infill zone at every layer until desired height is achieved. Install geogrid reinforcement when required.

All concrete components should be secured with approved adhesive.

PYRAMID STEPS

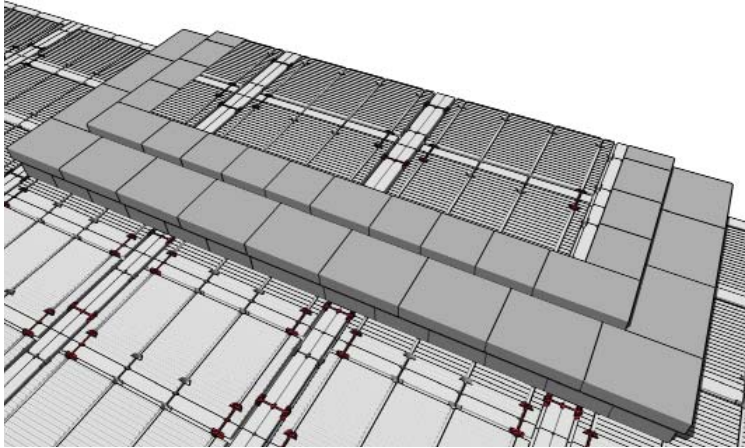


1 FIRST STEP

Choose the proper U-Core unit based on the wall block height, using the Product Specific Cross-Sections (page 12). Construct the step risers directly on a layer of U-Core. Start installing U-Core from the back and work forward out from the wall. Cut the U-Core to size using a Sawzall Reciprocating Saw if required.

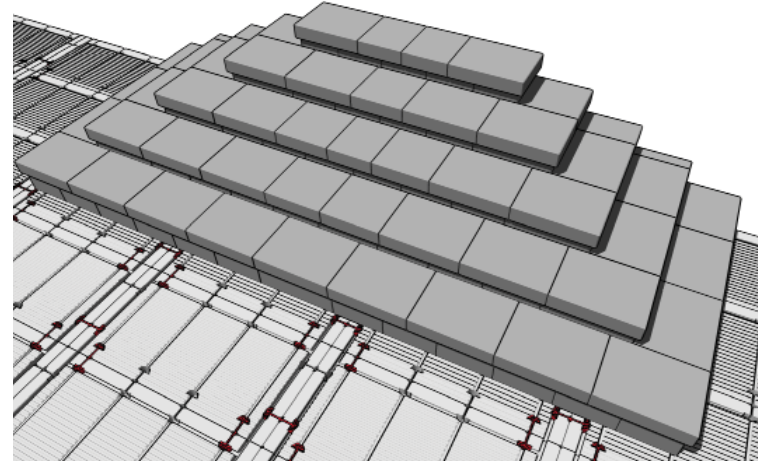
2 INSTALL COPING

Install the coping for the step tread and secure with approved adhesive.



3 SECOND STEP

Build the second risers and install U-Core in the infill zone, working forward out from the wall. Again, place the U-Core with the Accessories Channel towards the back.



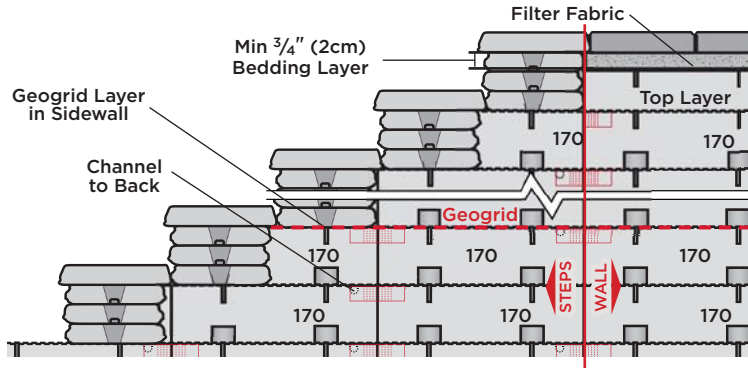
4 REPEAT

Continue building up the steps using U-Core in the infill zone at every layer until desired height is achieved.

All concrete components should be secured with approved adhesive.

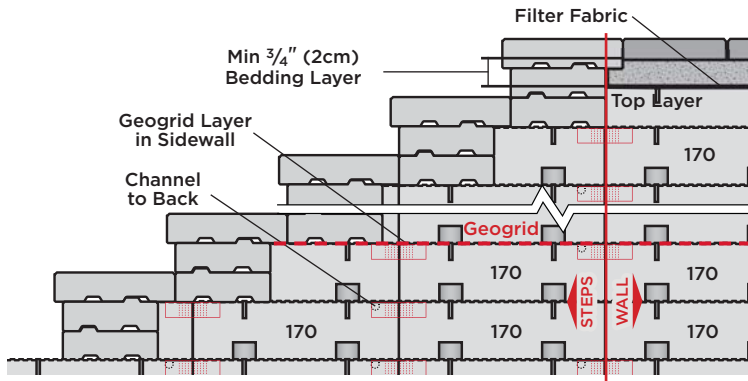
PRODUCT SPECIFIC CROSS-SECTIONS

General Arrangement Only. Always refer to the most up-to-date Engineered Details



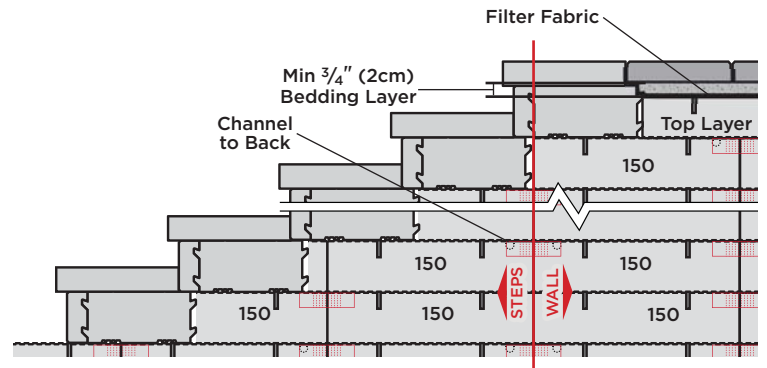
1 RIVERCREST

Lower Layers	U-Core 170 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 150 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks



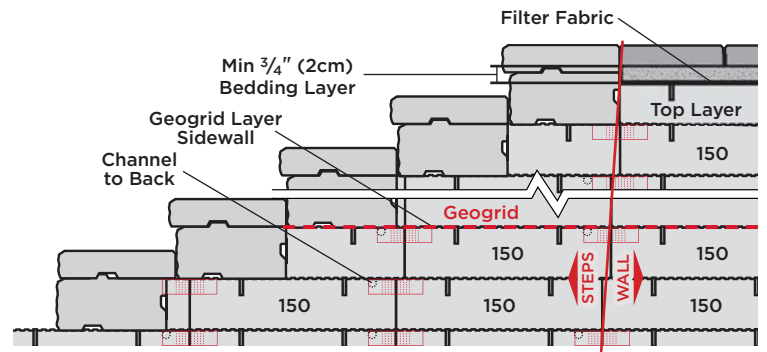
2 PISA SMOOTH & PISAEDGE

Lower Layers	U-Core 170 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 150 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks



3 U-CARA

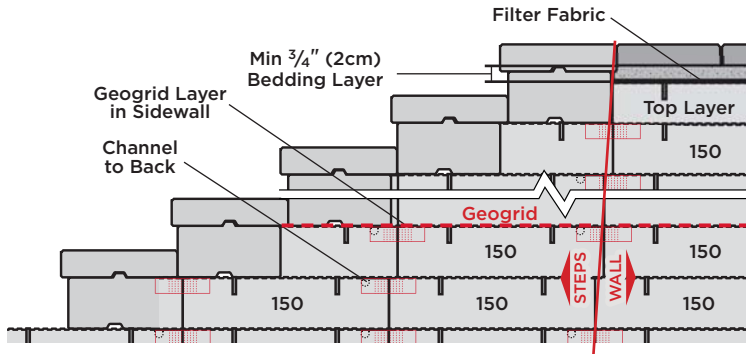
Lower Layers	U-Core 150 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks



4 PISA, CONCORD WALL & ROMAN PISA

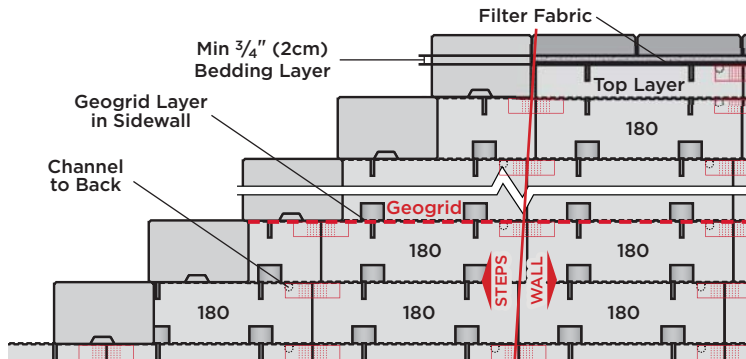
Lower Layers	U-Core 150 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks

PRODUCT SPECIFIC CROSS-SECTIONS



5 PISA XL, PISA XL SMOOTH, CONCORD XL & CONCORD XL SMOOTH

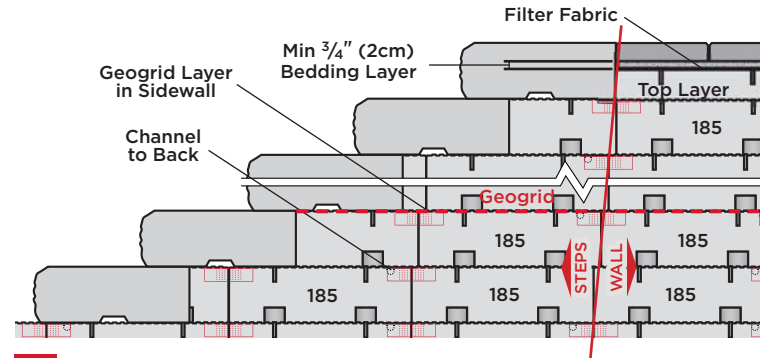
Lower Layers	U-Core 150 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks



6 SIENAEDGE & SIENASMOOTH

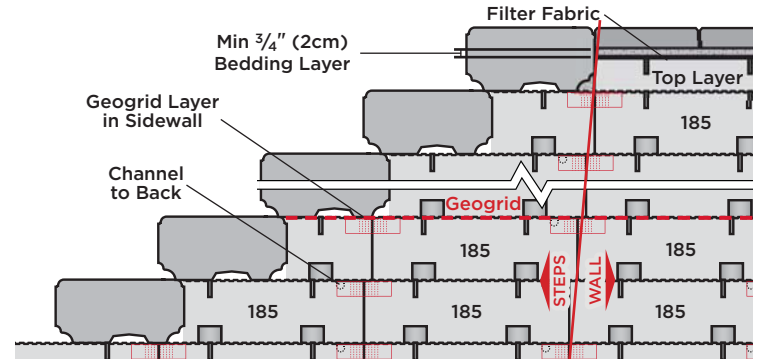
Lower Layers	U-Core 180 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks

General Arrangement Only. Always refer to the most up-to-date Engineered Details



7 SIENASTONE

Lower Layers	U-Core 185 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks



8 SONOMASTONE

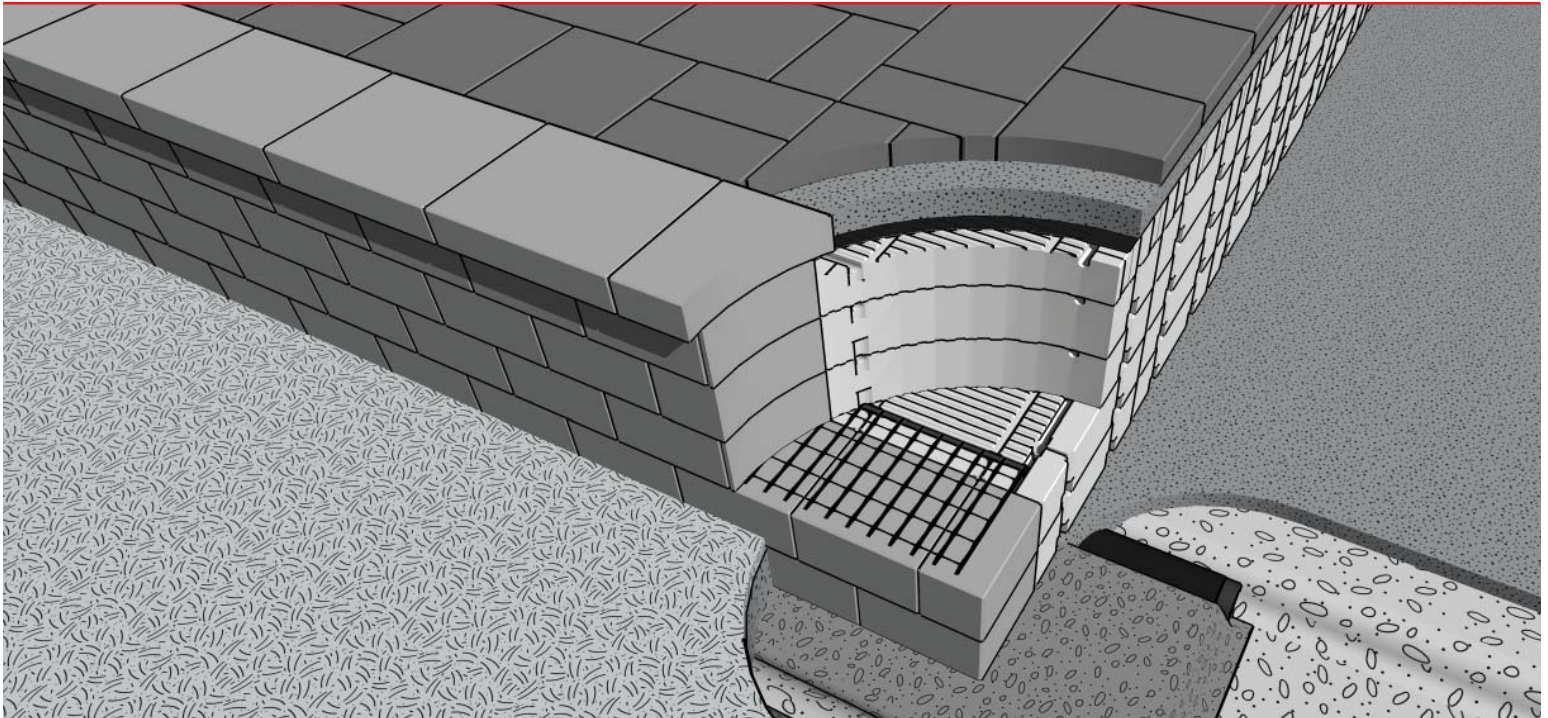
Lower Layers	U-Core 185 blocks
60mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks
70mm Paver Top Layer	U-Core 100 blocks

PRODUCT SIZING CHART

Unilock offers a wide variety of U-Core height sizes to match the retaining wall block height for the product you are using. The chart below shows the correct U-core sizes to use when ordering. For the top layer, the U-Core size may vary depending on the paver height size (60mm or 70mm) being installed on top of the U-Core, this is to allow a minimum bedding layer of $\frac{3}{4}$ " (2cm) between the U-Core and the pavers.

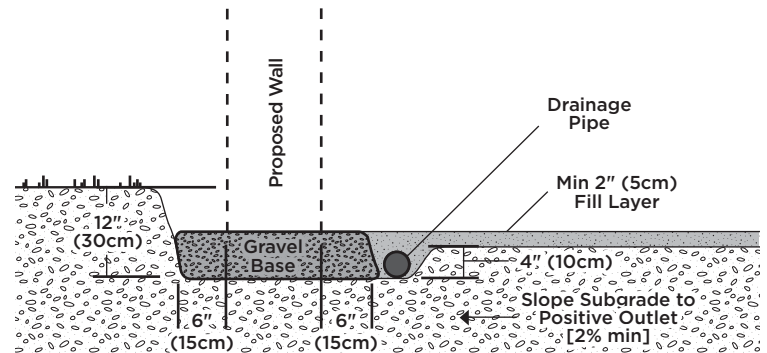
RETAINING WALL BLOCK	LOWER LAYERS	TOP LAYER BASED ON PAVER HEIGHT	
		60mm Paver	70mm Paver
Rivercrest®	U-Core 170	U-Core 150	U-Core 100
PisaSmooth®	U-Core 170	U-Core 150	U-Core 100
PisaEdge®	U-Core 170	U-Core 150	U-Core 100
U-Cara®	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
Pisa®	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
Pisa® XL	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
Pisa® XL Smooth	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
Concord Wall®	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
Concord® XL	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
Concord® XL Smooth	U-Core 150	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
SienaEdge®	U-Core 180	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
SienaSmooth®	U-Core 180	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
SienaStone®	U-Core 185	U-Core 100	U-Core 100
SonomaStone®	U-Core 185	U-Core 100	U-Core 100

RAISED PATIOS

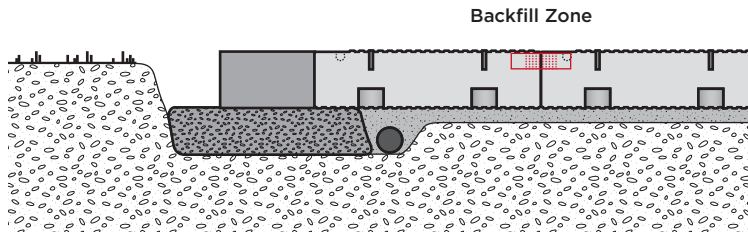


1 EXCAVATE

Excavate a trench for the wall gravel base with a minimum embedment of 6" (15cm) and the width of the wall block depth, plus 6" (15cm) front and back. Excavate the area under the proposed raised patio to ensure a minimum 2" (5cm) leveling pad that is level with the wall gravel base. Ensure the subgrade is sloped to a positive outlet (drainage pipe) at 2% min. Using washed ¼" angular chip, fill and compacted to a minimum 2" [5cm] depth, and ensure it is also sloped at 2% to a positive outlet as shown.

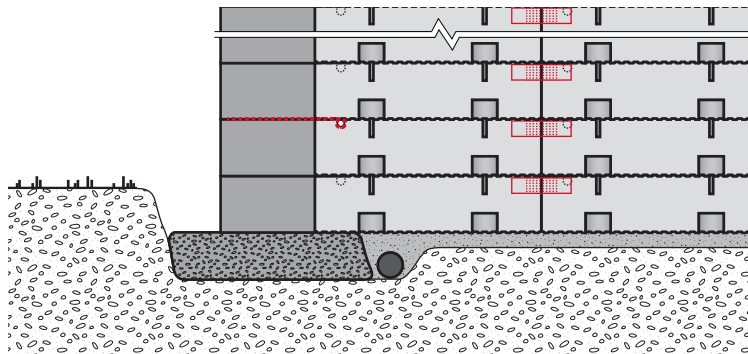


RAISED PATIOS



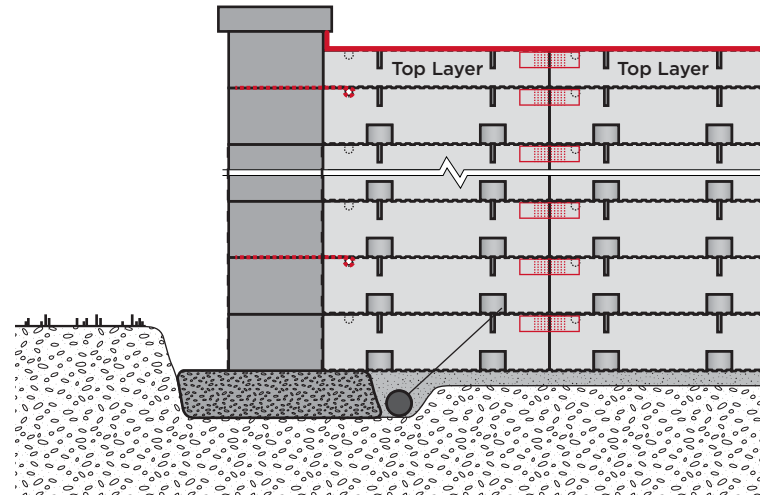
2 PLACE U-CORE

Place the first layer of U-Core units in the backfill zone and secure them together with connectors. Use the Patio Layout Example (page 20) for the correct placement of the U-Core blocks.



3 CONTINUE BUILDING

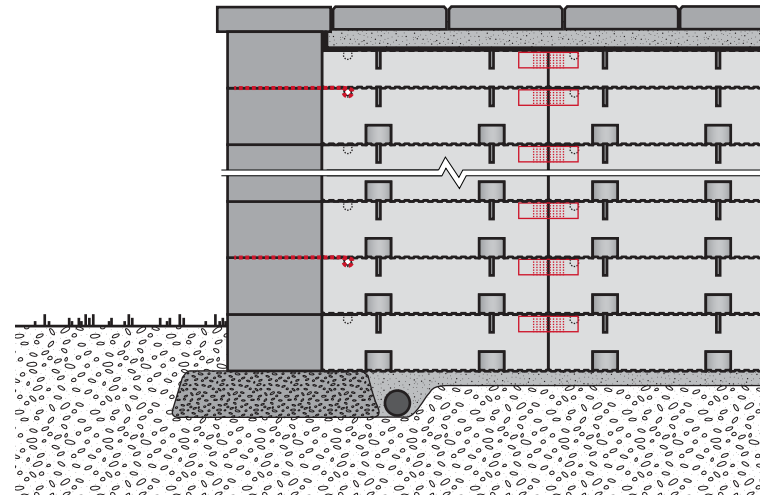
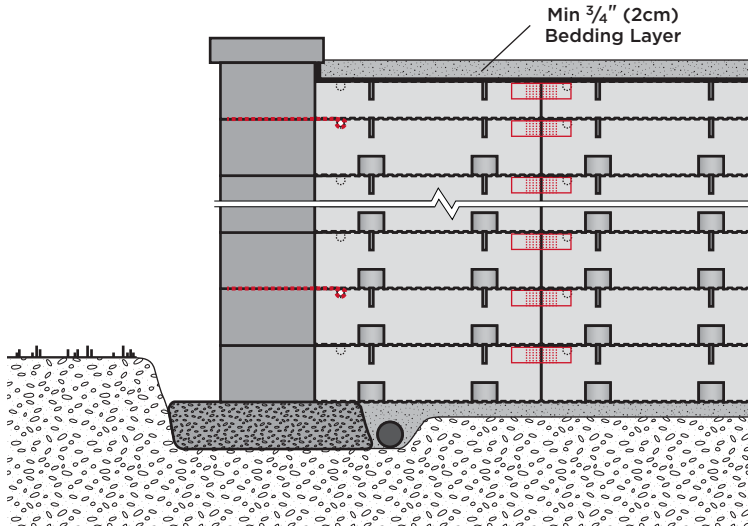
Continue building up the wall using U-Core in the infill zone at every layer until desired height is achieved. Install geogrid reinforcement when required for added stability utilizing the Geogrid Reinforcement Installation instructions (page 24).



4 TOP U-CORE LAYER

For the top layer, a smaller U-Core block is used to accommodate the paver height and bedding layer. Refer to Product Sizing Chart (page 14) for more information.

Place a layer of approved permeable non-woven geotextile over the U-Core units, ensuring it wraps up the back edge of the wall block and completely covers all the drainage holes in the U-Core. Overlap at the seams and stake in place using standard geotextile staples.



5 BEDDING LAYER

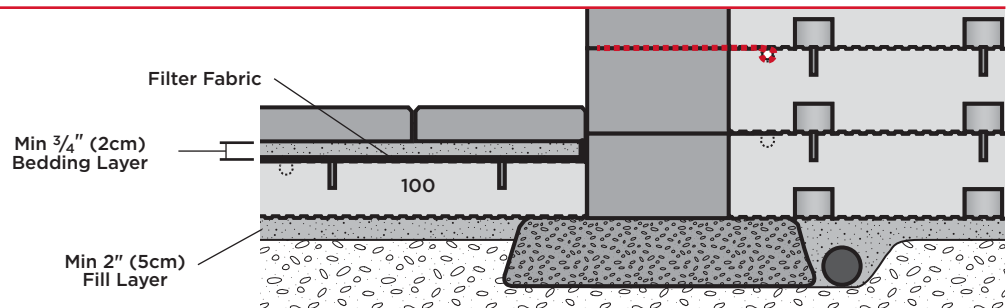
To allow for proper drainage, fill and screed a min. $\frac{3}{4}$ " [2 cm] bedding layer using washed $\frac{1}{4}$ " angular chip compacted to a dense state. When required, sloped the bedding layer to allow for proper runoff on the final paving stone grade.

6 PLACE PAVERS

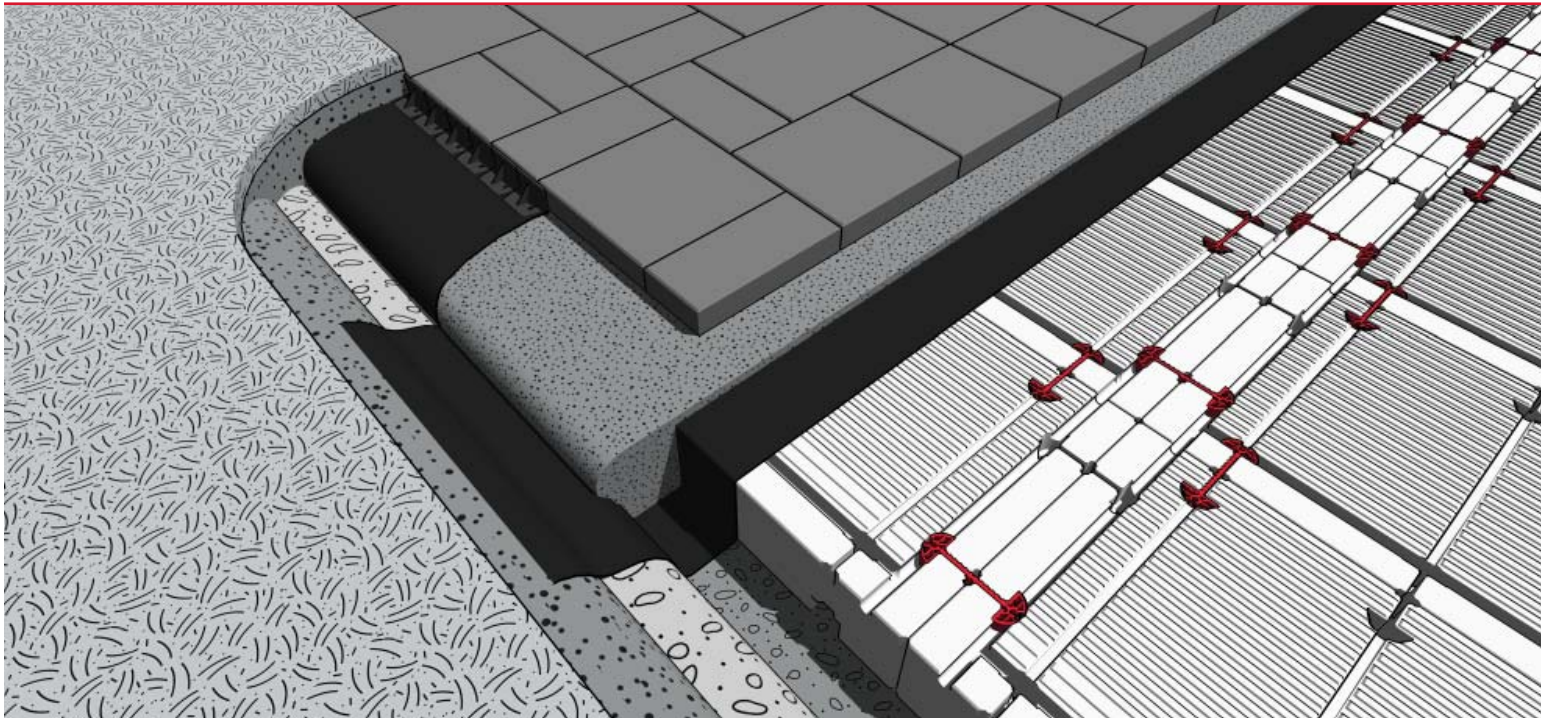
Layout the pavers in the desired pattern as normal. Just as with traditional paver installing ensure the pavers are set approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ " [0.5cm] above the desired grade to account for final compaction.

INSTALLING PAVERS IN FRONT OF THE WALL

We recommend using U- Core 100 blocks as the base when installing pavers in front of the wall. Install the U-Core directly on the wall gravel base as shown and run the filter fabric up the face of the wall. Refer to Patios & Pathways (page 18) for a detailed explanation of installing patios at ground level.



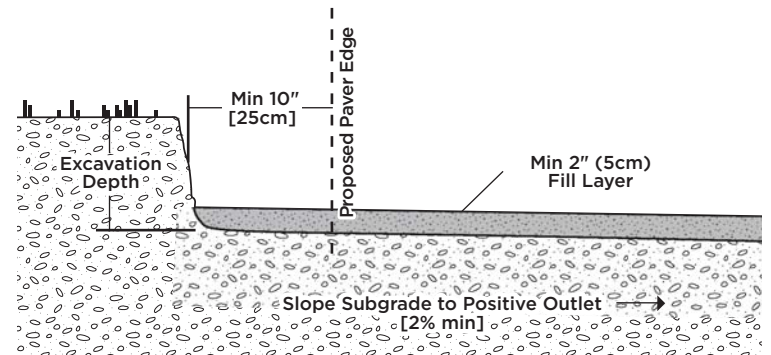
PATIOS & PATHWAYS AT GROUND LEVEL

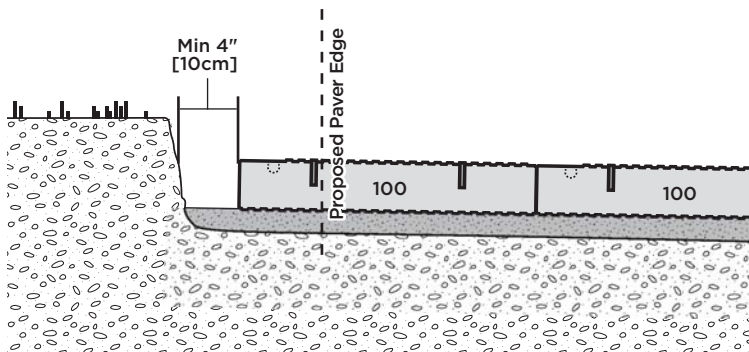


1 EXCAVATE

Utilize the formula below to calculate the Excavation Depth, we recommend using U-Core 100. The excavated area should extend outward by 10" [25cm] past the proposed paver edge. Ensure the subgrade is sloped to a positive outlet at 2% min. Using washed ¼" angular chip, fill and compacted to a min. 2" [5cm] depth, and ensure it is also sloped at 2% to a positive outlet.

Excavation Depth = Paver Height + Bedding Layer + U-Core Height + Gravel Base

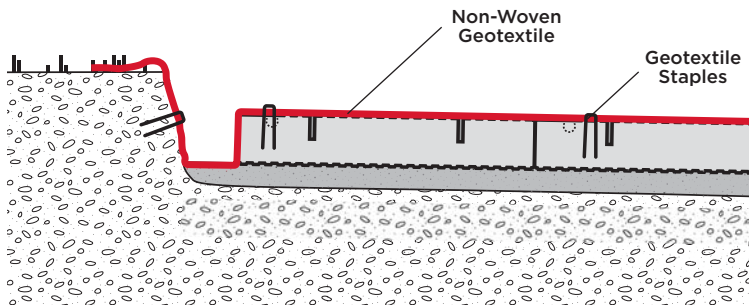




2 PLACE U-CORE

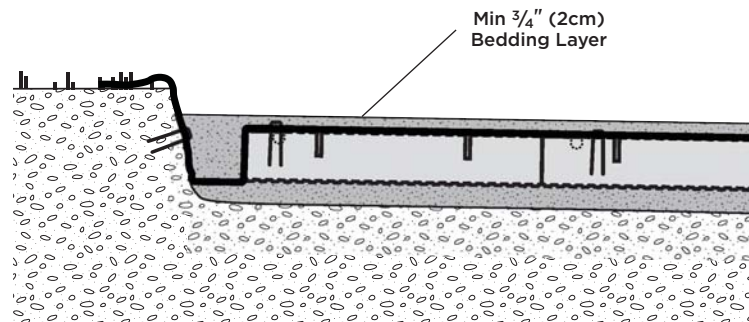
For patios and pathways, we recommend using U-Core 100. Place the U-Core a min. 4" [10cm] from the edge of the excavation area. Use the Patio Layout Example (page 20) for the correct placement of the U-Core blocks.

Note: For curved edges, cut the U-Core to shape using a Sawzall-type Reciprocating Saw.



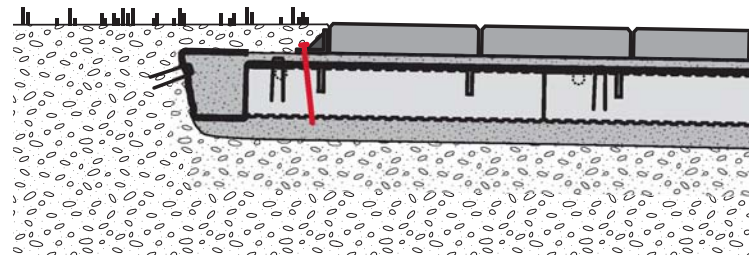
3 NON-WOVEN GEOTEXTILE

Place a layer of approved permeable non-woven geotextile over the U-Core units, ensuring a min. 4" [10cm] overlap at the seams and stake in place using standard geotextile staples. Extend the geotextile down the face of the U-Core and stake into the wall of the excavation.



4 BEDDING LAYER

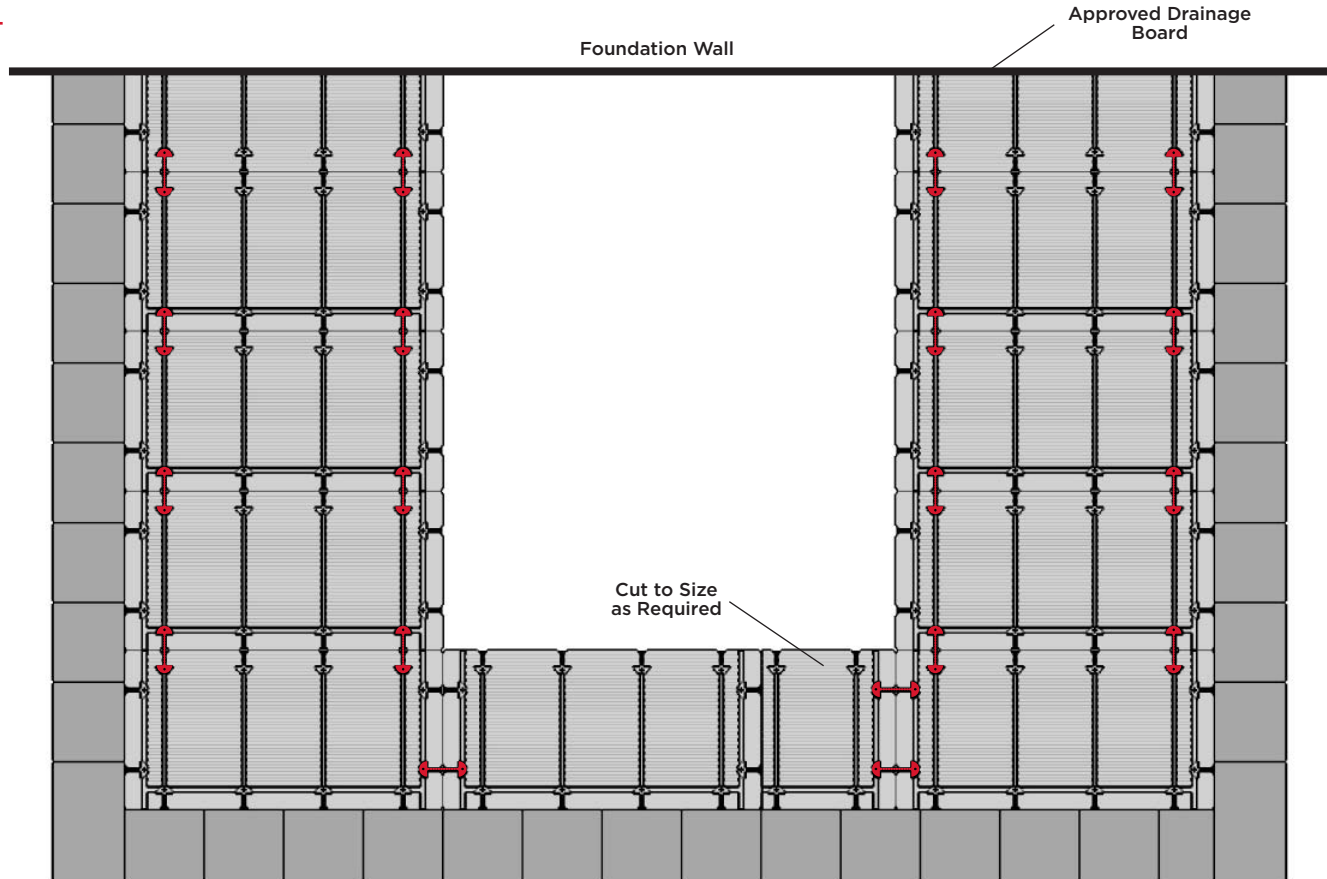
To allow for proper drainage, fill and screed a min. 3/4" [2 cm] bedding layer using washed 1/4" angular chip compacted to a dense state. Extend the bedding layer to fill the gap around the perimeter between the U-Core and the excavation area.



5 LAYING PAVERS

Lay out the pavers in the desired pattern as normal. Just as with traditional paver installing ensure the pavers are set approximately 1/4" [0.5cm] above the desired grade to account for final compaction. Install edge restraint and secure with 10" landscape spike and a 10°-20° angle into the U-Core as shown. Fold the geotextile back over the drainage fill around the perimeter and replace the topsoil and sod. Sand joints and compact as normal.

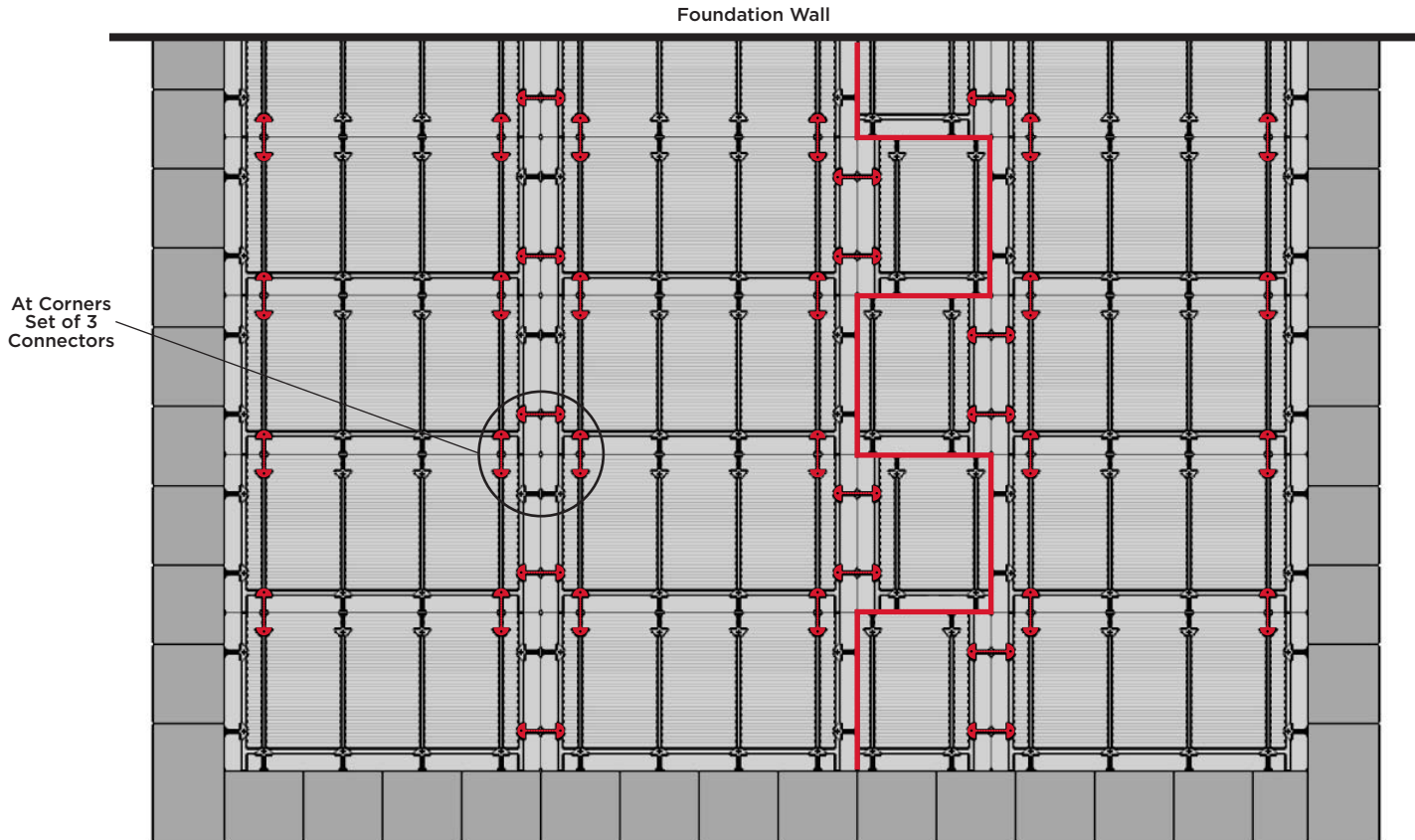
PATIO LAYOUT EXAMPLE



1 INSTALL PERIMETER

Install U-Core around the perimeter edge as shown. Cut U-Core to size with a reciprocating saw where required. For the perimeter, utilize Connectors around the edge where possible.

PATIO LAYOUT EXAMPLE



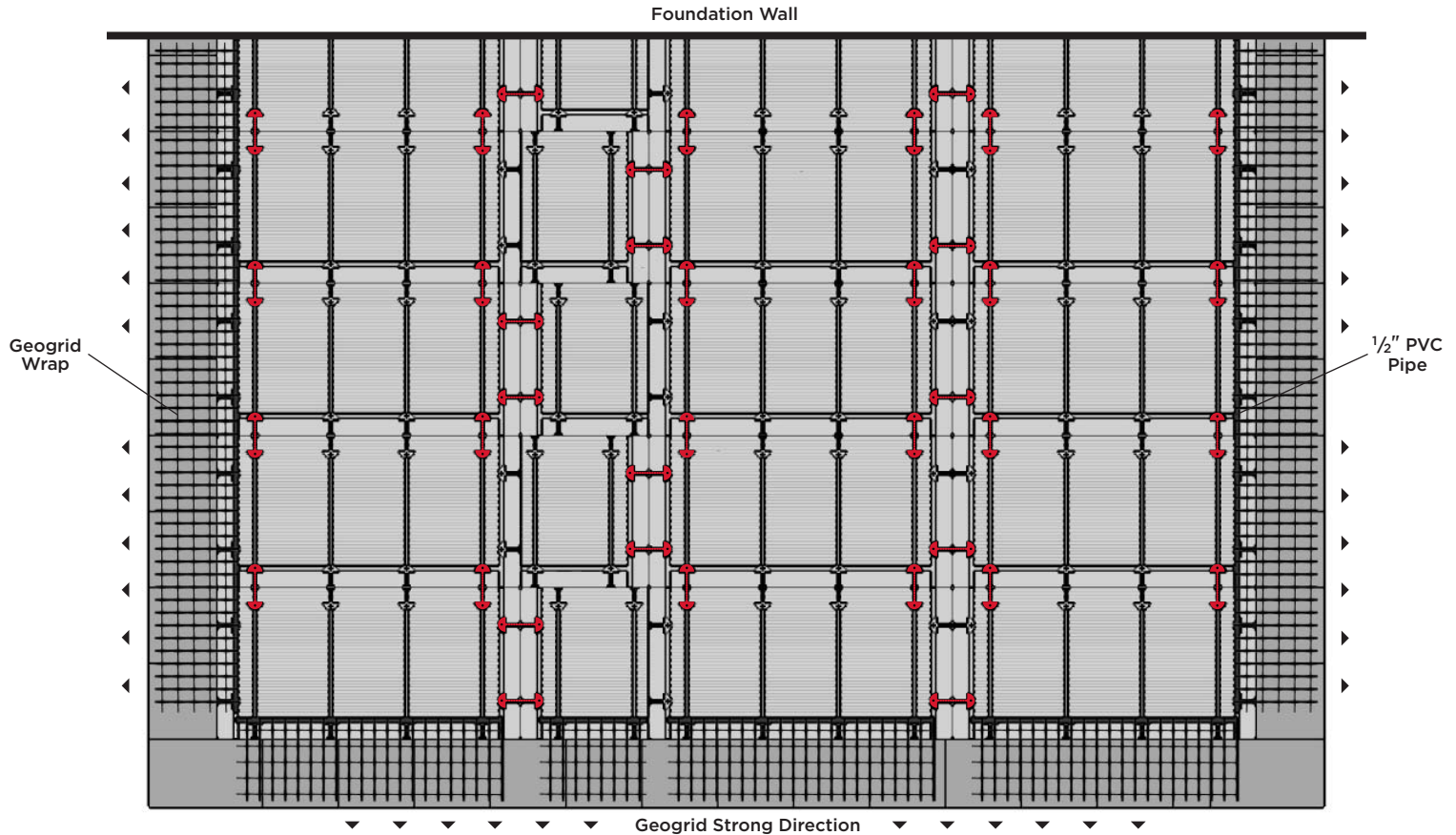
2 INSTALL INTERIOR

Fill the interior with U-Core units and install connectors. Only three (3) connectors are required in corners, two (2) on the long edges and one (1) on the short edge.

3 ZIPPER BOND

Where cut units are required, install in a zipper bond pattern as shown, alternating the edge that allows for connectors. This will ensure the system is locked together. Place connectors where possible.

PATIO LAYOUT EXAMPLE | GEOGRID

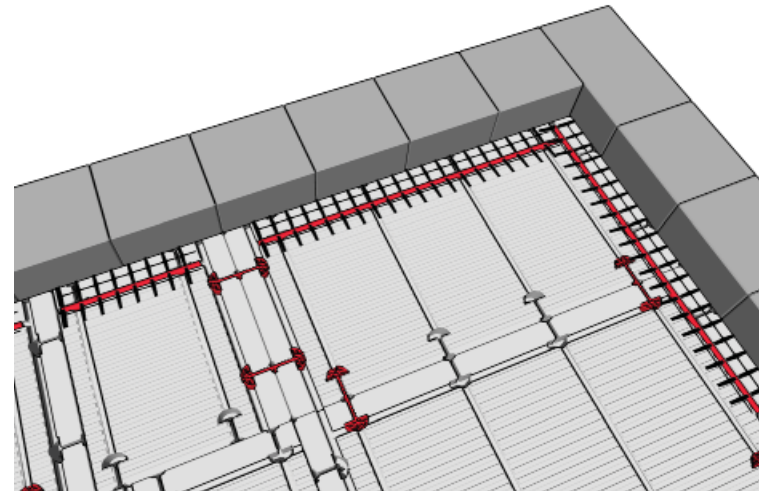
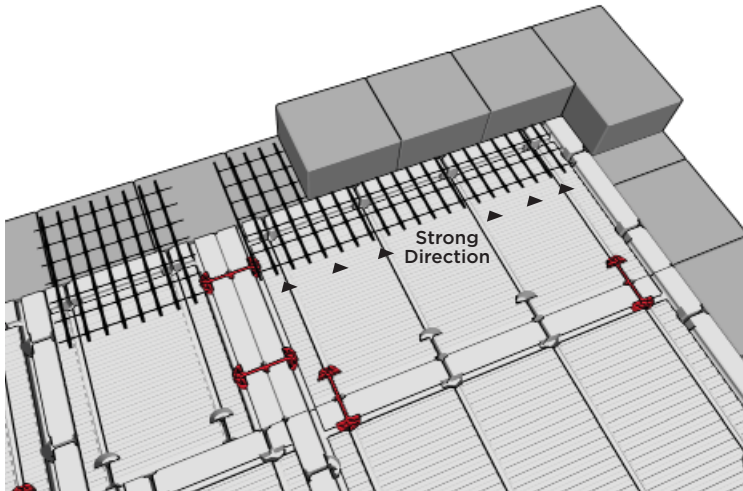


5 INSTALL GEOGRID

Install geogrid reinforcement around the perimeter on the second layer using the Geogrid Reinforcement Installation instructions (page 24). Ensure the geogrid is being place with the strong direction engaging the U-Core and the wall block.

Geogrid Reinforcement should be installed on the second and then every third U-Core layer.

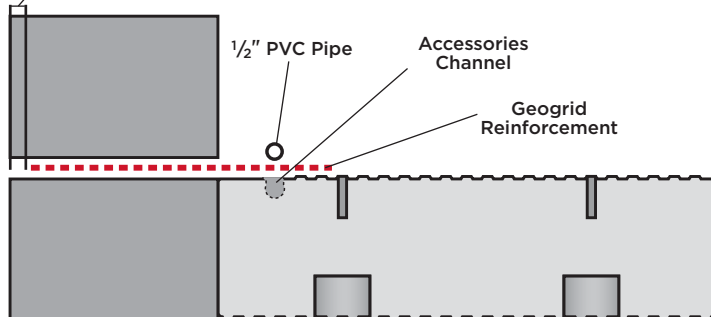
GEOGRID REINFORCEMENT INSTALLATION



1 LAY OUT THE GRID

Lay out the geogrid reinforcement as shown the strong direction, with the front edge a min. 1" [25mm] from the front of the wall block and place the next block on top.

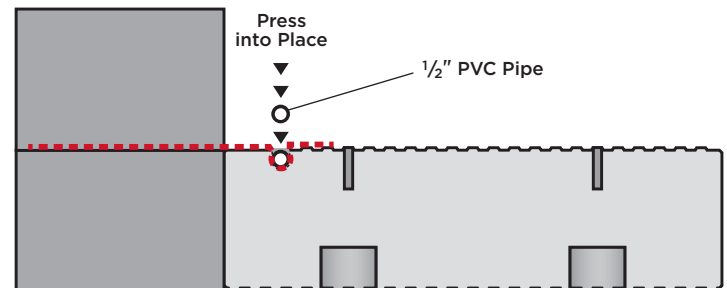
Grid Length = 8" [20cm] + Block Depth
Min. 1" [25mm]

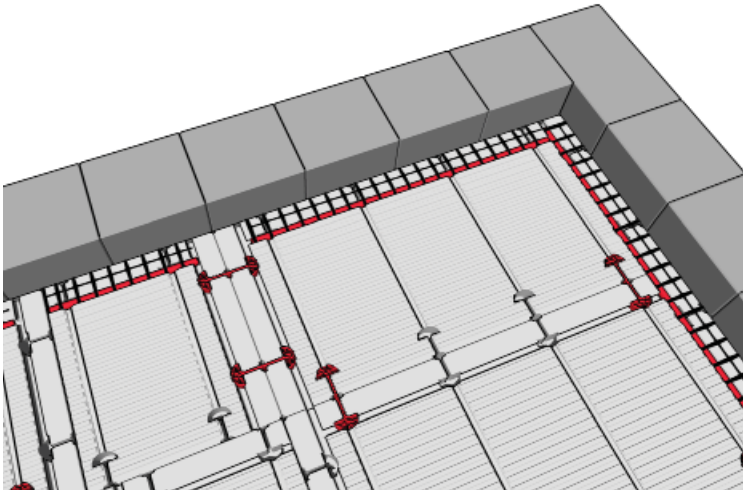


2 INSTALL THE PIPE

Hold the back edge of the geogrid tight and press fit a 1/2" PVC Pipe into the Accessories Channel. Cut the PVC Pipe and geogrid to length as required.

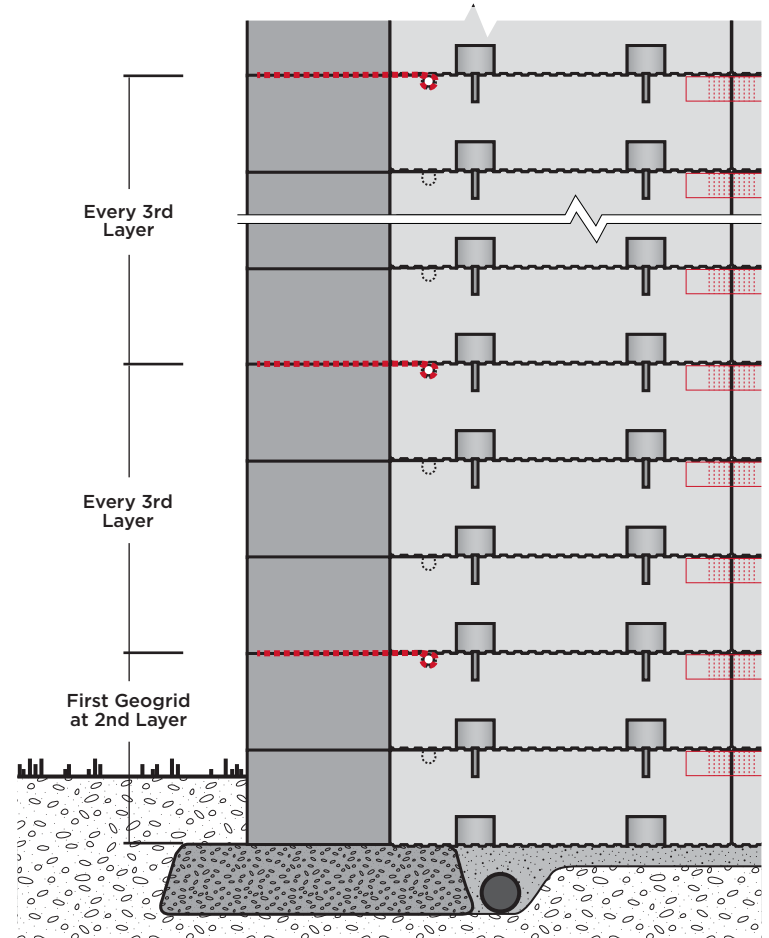
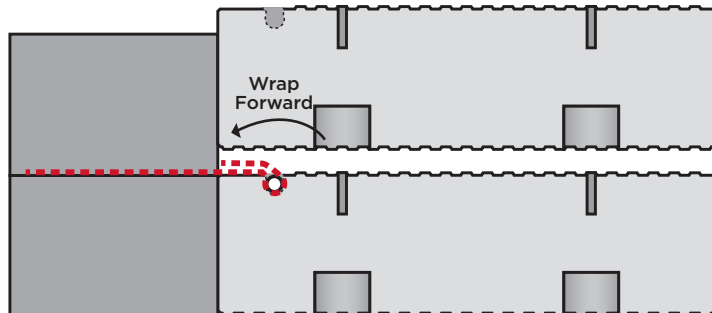
The outside diameter of the pipe should be 0.84" [21mm] to function properly.





3 WRAP FORWARD

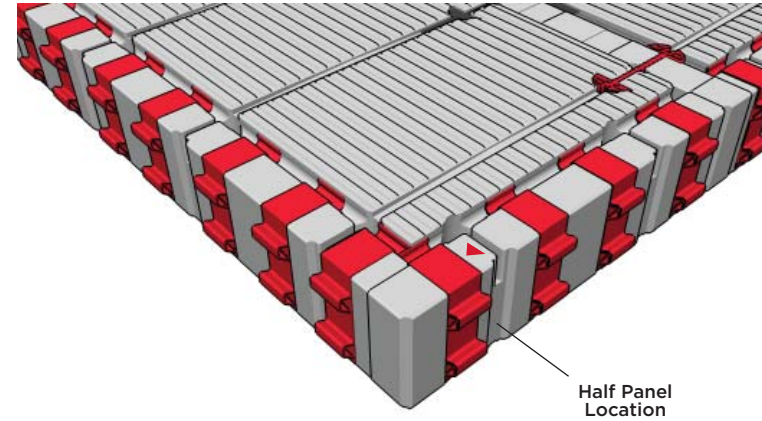
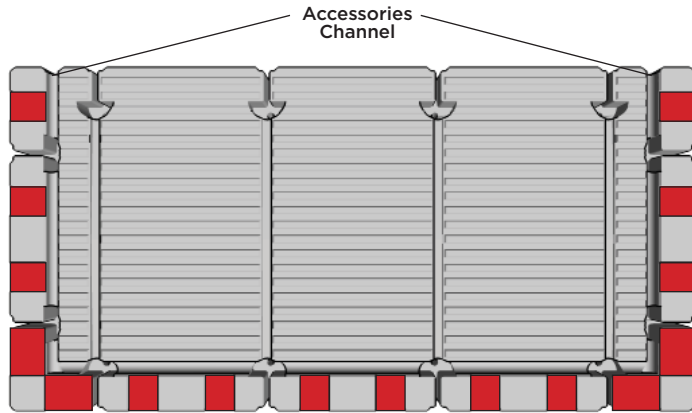
Wrap the back of the geogrid over the top of the pipe toward the front of the block before placing the next U-core unit on top.



4 GOING HIGH

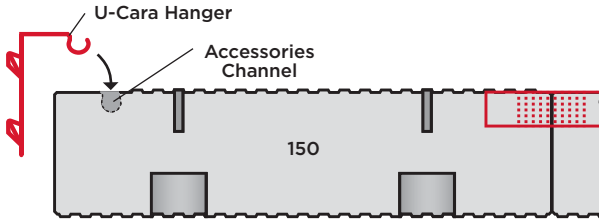
The first layer of geogrid reinforcement should always be installed at the second layer of U-Core units. Then geogrid should be installed at every successive third U-Core layer after that. Refer to the Engineered Details for maximum allowable wall heights.

U-CARA® PANEL INSTALLATION



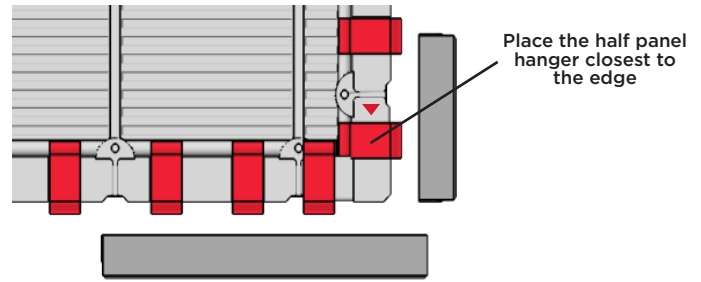
1 HANGER LOCATIONS

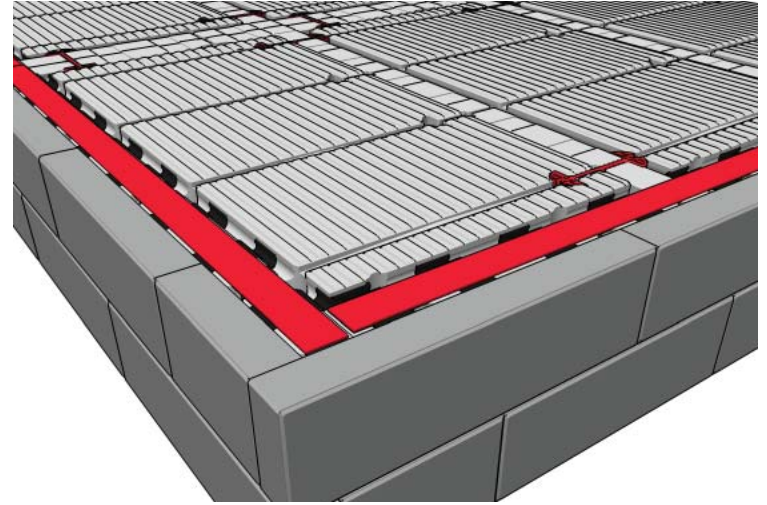
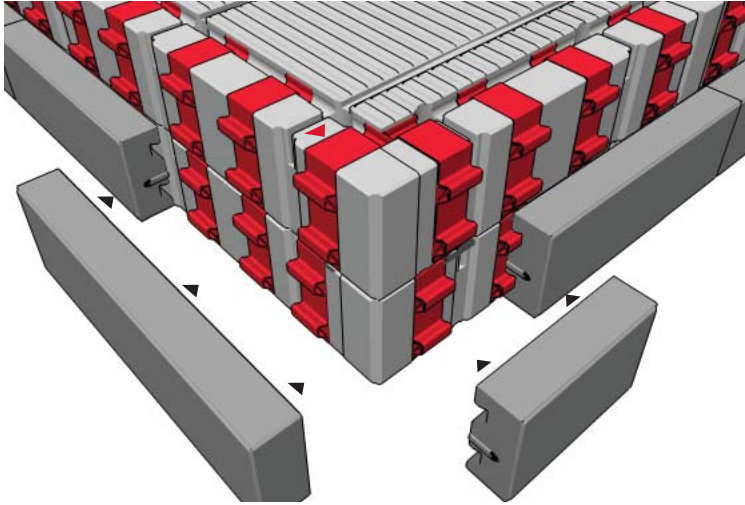
The U-Core 150 unit has been specifically designed for U-Cara fascia panels and features 16 indented Hanger locations along the Accessories Channel where the hangers can be installed. Hangers should only be placed in one of these indented locations. The Hangers should easily clip into place, allowing the panel to hang at the correct height. Layout the U-Core blocks so that there is always an accessories channel along the patio wall edge.



2 INSTALL HANGERS & PANELS

When using U-Core with fascia panels, you should install Hangers in all available hanger locations where the fascia panels will be installed. Layout the U-Core block so that there is always an accessories channel on the edge. Place all hangers on one layer before moving onto the next. Start at the corner installing the Hanger for the short U-Cara panel as close as possible to the corner, so the half panel has adequate support.



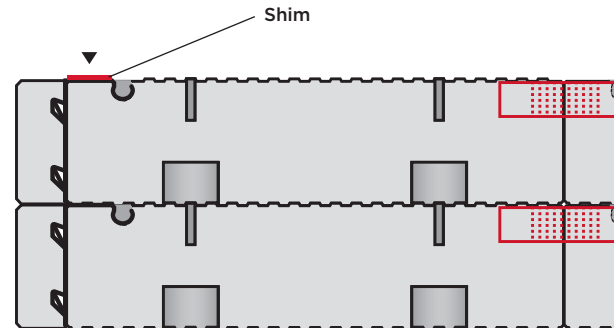
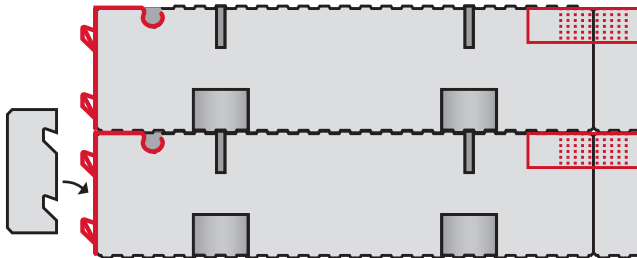


3 CONTINUE

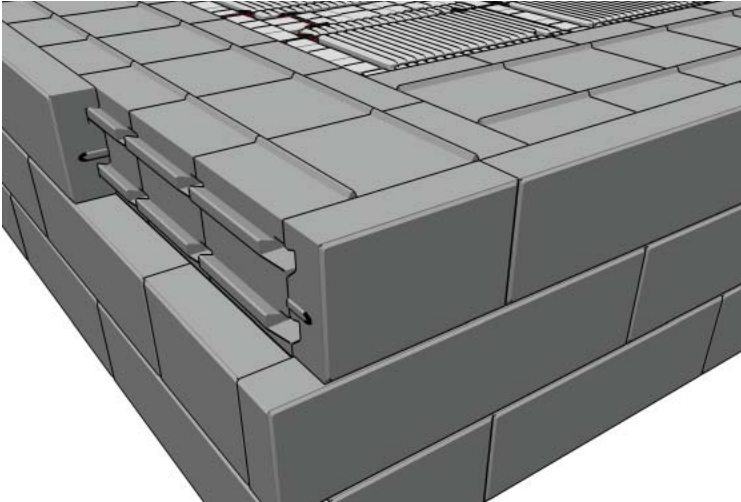
Install the next U-Core layer before installing panels on the layer below. Ensure that each panel is supported along its length by at least two Hangers. If you need to adjust the location of a hanger in the corner, gently lift the top U-Core layer at the corner and move the hangers. Alternate the bond pattern of the panels in the corner locations at each layer. Continue building the wall until you reach the second last layer.

4 PLACE SHIMS FOR LAST LAYER

Before proceeding on to the last U-Cara layer, use the provided 1/8" [3mm] thick shims, and place along the outer edge of the U-Core. This will support the backer block at the correct height, leveling the front with the interlocking ridges.

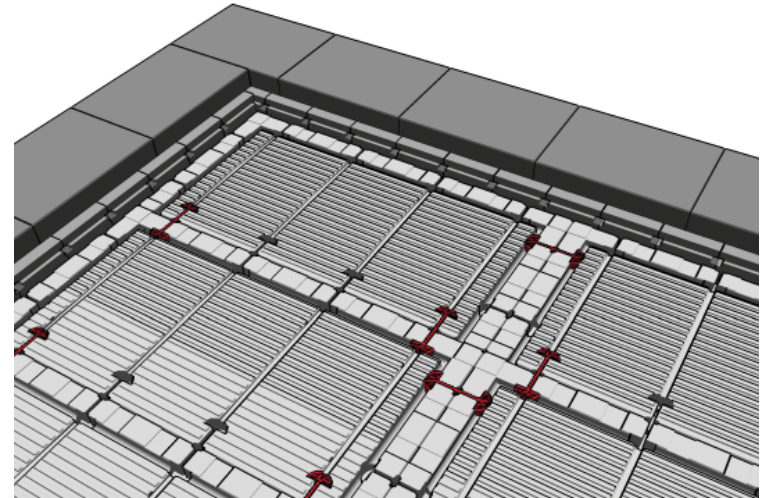
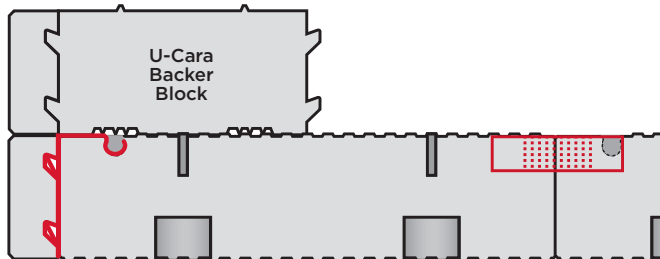


U-CARA® PANEL INSTALLATION



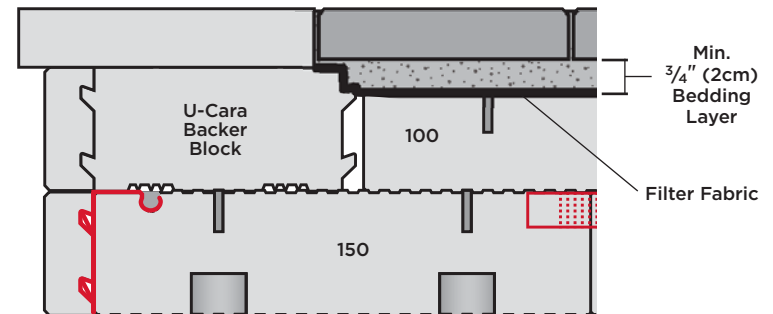
5 LAST LAYER

For patios where pavers will be installed, the last layer should consist of large U-Cara backer blocks for the perimeter (*Refer to the U-Cara Installation Guide for more information*). Secure the backer block to the U-Core using approved adhesive.



6 LAST LAYER U-CORE

Utilize the smaller U-Core 100 block for the infill zone to allow for a minimum $\frac{3}{4}$ " [2cm] bedding layer. See Product Specific Cross-Sections (page 12) for more information. Place a layer of approved permeable non-woven geotextile over the U-Core units, ensuring it wraps up the back edge of the wall block and completely covers all the drainage holes in the U-Core.





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