



THE WALLA WALLA VALLEY

Weekly

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Family hopes pro-quality cleanser hits the spot...

Oil invades perfectly implemented parking area

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Home Place



I could hear my fears echoed in voices over the phone.

Sometimes it was simply a long groan on an exhaled breath.

This is bad, bad, bad, my brain mutters. Exactly as I thought.

You might recall two springs ago Camo Man and I tackled our back yard in what is euphemistically called The Yearly Project. Never you mind it has consistently doubled itself and resulted in two backbreaking projects each spring; that's not the point here. My yard then was a messy hybrid of grass, landscaping bark and unruly plant life. The part wearing bark had morphed into a parking area, meaning on each wet day our feet would carry pieces of wood mulch — or worse — into the house.

No one was enjoying my reaction to that. We decided to upgrade to a legitimate parking surface.

My rule was it had to look nice, not redneck, a battle I lose a little more each passing year.

Thus we bit the concrete bullet, parlaying a couple of paychecks into approximately a billion preformed blocks in shades of gray and tan. We bought landscape timbers for borders, a load of gravel and another of sand — a mountain of each.

The price tag quickly rocketed out of sight, the way these things do.

But Camo Man's work was priceless. He dug out what needed digging down and thrice leveled each layer of material forming the bed. It was like watching an upside down Michelangelo, him out there on his knees, and his face inches from the ground.

We rented a gravel compactor, shaking our brains as we ran it to create the perfect surface. Then the pavers went down, one at a time, with exact precision that was painful to participate in.

After 200 more steps it was done and glorious to behold. We had a new surface to throw parties on and let grandchildren ride scooters and such. It was a work of art, and I bored people with brag photos on Facebook.

That was then. Now? Now we have oil spots on the Sistine Chapel of The Pavers. Only one side (and it's not the side I park on).

It's at these times you can tell our marriage is young. Me, I can't wrap my head around all that money and work spoiled by — gasp — everyday wear and tear. Or why anyone would allow the problem to continue like Chinese water torture.

Camo's response? "It'll be OK. I'll get the pressure washer out when it's warmer."

Those spots rise up in my Macbethian dreams, particularly after trying applications of vinegar, degreaser, Dawn and curses. There had to be magic somewhere.

Last week I met my oil-spot twin. Soul mate. Blood brother.

I started my quest for ammunition at local concrete suppliers. Ashley sighed deeply and suggested I might want to consider trying Goo Gone. Mark groaned a little at mention of oil on pavers.

Eventually I was led to the Spokane manufacturer who distributes the 9-by-6-inch blocks in our area, and manager John Kunz.

John was very sympathetic, assuring me the concrete sealer I applied certainly should have lasted this long. He told me about a product that might just work, made by the SEK-Surebond company in Illinois.

I hung up the phone and found the website in the same breath — and that's where I went down the rabbit hole.

Surebond is all about solutions, judging from its website, and it has the videos to prove it.

Like an addict, I watched the Oil Extractor Oil Stain Cleaner demonstration over and over, mesmerized by the sight of an oil-infused chunk of concrete reborn as clean. The process comes with its own vocabulary, including "dwell time" and "poultice."

Words from heaven.

That's when I called Jay Krech, Surebond's technical director, and met my new best friend.

Jay, I learned, spent more than 40 years in the landscape industry, and he's enthusiastic about all of it.

Removing oil from concrete is like reversing the clock, he said. Not easily done.

Once oil is there, Mother Nature has her way with it, using baking sun and driving rain. Paver blocks are more porous than poured concrete, the holes a haven for the greasy drops.

"The longer it sits, the deeper the penetration," Jay said, helpfully.

When people tackle the problem, we sometimes use ineffective cleaners and have unrealistic expectations. And almost all of us are too impatient to get the best results out of any product, he noted.

Ahem.

After 45 minutes or so of "dwell time" (I could say that all day) the gelatinous Surebond stuff works by drawing the oil up, out of that concrete sponge and into the "poultice" of white rags or paper towels. It's biodegradable and doesn't act like a jerk to other surfaces, apparently.

The process often needs to be repeated for mature spots, "and that's OK," Jay assured me.

"There's a lot of science in it, but oil removal tends to be an art."

He's lucky, he added, "to work for a company that has good products."

I'm eagerly waiting for my Surebond package to find out for myself.

And when that spot is all gone for good? Another angel gets its wings.

Pretty sure.

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