

Dear Friend,

Each month, BOWA Home Advisor provides you with important tips on how to improve and protect your home's value. We hope the following is helpful.



Covered Deck
Arlington, VA

Is your Deck Ready for Entertaining?

No matter what type of deck you have – wood, concrete, tile, composite – it is important to adopt a regular maintenance routine to keep your deck looking beautiful for years to come. The greatest maintenance challenges are keeping the surface clean and prolonging the structure's life by patching, painting, staining and/or sealing.

Here, we will focus on the steps necessary to properly maintain a wooden deck. There are a variety of different wood products used in deck construction, including hardwoods, pressure treated softwoods, cedar, cypress, mahogany, redwood, etc.

On the lower end of the maintenance spectrum is hardwood, such as Ipe, which is said to outlast all traditional decking materials. Ipe can be sealed with a UV inhibiting sealer to preserve the natural color, or it can be left un-sealed to change to a nice silver-grey color over time. Similarly, decks built with traditional redwood and cedar each contain natural preservatives, and can be left untreated to weather naturally or can be sealed to enhance the color and provide additional protection.

Another option in deck construction is pressure-treated lumber. While this material resists insects and decay, it is vulnerable to moisture and the sun's rays and requires a regular cycle of maintenance. If left unprotected the boards are likely to warp, shrink, splinter and crack even after just a few-months time. However, with proper maintenance, a deck made with pressure treated wood can last 20 years or more.

While most of the following tips apply to caring for pressure-treated lumber decks, some may be helpful to getting the most out of all types of deck products.

Recommended Regular Maintenance

- Start by clearing the deck of furniture, toys, planters, grills, etc. so you can sweep away all the leaves and other debris.
- Carefully check for protruding nails/screws, splintering wood, loose or split boards, etc. In many cases you can simply drive the nails back down with a hammer, or replace the nail with a galvanized deck screw. Splintered areas should be lightly sanded until smooth. If a board is split, try gluing it with epoxy and clamping it in place until the epoxy has cured.
- Before cleaning, gently wash down the surrounding plants and grass with a garden hose. This will help to dilute any chemicals that may inadvertently come into contact with them, as even mild solutions can be harmful to your plantings. Also, consider covering plants with a plastic or cloth tarp for added protection.
- Choose either a bleach or non-bleach deck cleaner based on your desired effect. While both will remove dirt and grime, bleach cleaners lighten the wood and non-bleach cleaners are gentler to the environment and wood fibers and have little impact on the wood's natural aged color.
- Being sure to follow the manufacturer's directions and wear gloves and protective eyewear, use a roller, bucket and brush or a power sprayer on low pressure, to apply the cleaner.
- After waiting the directed length of time for the chemicals to do their work, thoroughly rinse the deck with a hose or pressure washer on a moderate setting. While a pressure washer is particularly effective for rinsing out both dirt and chemicals, too much pressure can gouge the wood or cause the grain to become exaggerated. Repeat this cleaning process as necessary.
- Once the area is completely dry, you're ready to apply a clear wood preservative or an exterior stain. Clear wood preservatives will bring new life to the surface and will not give any color to the deck. If you want to add color, use a solid or a semi-transparent exterior stain. As sealants with stain don't always deliver a uniform color across the wood, it is recommended that you try the stain first in an out-of-the-way spot to make sure the results match your expectations.
- Whether you're applying the sealant with a brush, roller or sprayer, be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions, wear eye protection and gloves, and keep your plants protected.
- It is best to apply a finish either early or late in the day when the wood is not in full sun. Otherwise, the heat will cause the finish to evaporate too quickly.
- Let the product set for about 20 minutes so that it will penetrate the wood. Then go back over the surface with a China bristle or natural bristle paintbrush, to help the product penetrate the wood and give it a more consistent finish.
- Apply a double coat for good coverage and protection, and allow the sealant to dry for one to two days.

Other Tips for Ongoing Care

- Keep your deck free of leaf, pine needle, dirt and other buildup with a regular sweeping. This debris retains water and can clog drainage channels or cause staining as it begins to decay.
- Periodically move planters, benches and other deck accessories to allow the deck under them to dry thoroughly. Consider putting small blocks under a large planter to keep air moving underneath and to prevent stains on the deck.
- Grease from a gas grill will stain a deck, and these stains are permanent. Place a mat under the grill to avoid this and clean the overflow compartment of the grill frequently.
- Never use a charcoal grill on a wooden deck. The hot coals can fall out of the bottom and burn holes through the deck.

With the work behind you, all you have left to do is get ready for a summer full of outdoor entertaining with family and friends. Enjoy!

For your convenience, past issues of the *BOWA Home Advisor*, are available in the 'About Us' section of our [web site](#).

If you would like more information on any of these topics or if there are other ways we can be of service, please contact [BOWA Builders](#).

Regards.



Kathy Kelly
BOWA Builders, Inc.
kathyk@bowa.com
phone: (703) 734-9050
www.bowa.com

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