

# A Like-New Look for an Aging Deck



ONE of the most popular gathering places around the house when summer arrives is not inside the home itself but outside, on the deck or terrace.

And whether that deck or terrace is made of ordinary treated wood, exotic hardwood, cedar, redwood or one of the new composite materials, it will look better and last longer with regular maintenance.

“Most decks are severely neglected,” said Danny Lipford, host of the nationally syndicated home improvement television show “Today’s Homeowner.” “Every deck needs to be cleaned at least once a year, and now is the time to do it.”

Start with a deck detergent — available at home centers and hardware stores — mix it according to the instructions and apply it with a garden-style sprayer, Mr. Lipford said. “Saturate the entire deck, let it sit for 10 or 15 minutes to loosen up the dirt, and then use a stiff brush or pressure washer to clean off all the dirt and grime.” Be careful with a pressure washer, he advised, because using too much pressure or holding the tip too close can gouge the wood.

Once the detergent has been thoroughly rinsed away, he said, allow the deck to dry for two or three days before applying a stain or sealer. If you want to change the color of the deck, a semi-transparent stain should go on next, Mr. Lipford said.

The sealer, which waterproofs the wood and protects it from sun damage, can be applied after the stain dries. “I recommend putting a clear sealer on it,” Mr. Lipford said. “That will darken the wood just slightly. And apply two coats, one on one day, and the other on the next.”

Dave MacAusland, the owner of Sun Frog, a deck restoration company in Portland, Ore., adds a few more steps before sealing.

After cleaning the deck with a detergent, he uses an “intermediate brightener” and then a product called Born Again to restore the color. When the deck is dry, he applies a penetrating oil that dries to a hard finish to seal and protect the wood. (His company’s products are available at [sunfrog.com](http://sunfrog.com).)

Wash Safe Industries, in Harwich, Mass., makes what it calls an environmentally safe deck cleaner. John Redihan, the company’s owner, said that Wash Safe, which uses foam produced by hydrogen peroxide to lift mold and mildew out of the wood, is nontoxic, will not harm plants or lawns and biodegrades after about six hours. It is available at [wash-safe.com](http://wash-safe.com).

In its July issue, Consumer Reports singles out a few other deck sealers as being effective: Flood Solid Color Deck & Siding Stain, Sikken's Cetol SRD, McCloskey Storm Coat Deck, Fence & Siding Stains, Thompson's WaterSeal Deck & House and True Value Woodsman Deck & Siding Stain.

To clean decks or terraces made of exotic woods like ipe, mahogany, teak or ironwood, Al Ismaili, the owner of All Pro Painting and Deck Restoration in San Francisco, recommends a mop and a solution of water and mild soap, like dish detergent.

And when cleaners fail to bring a deck back to life, it may be time for more drastic steps.

Three years ago, Kathy Boston of Oakland, Calif., added a redwood deck to her home.

After about a year, the deck started to lose its "like-new" look, Ms. Boston said, so she had it power washed and stained. Dissatisfied with the result, she hired another contractor to redo the work. "Then it started peeling, cracking and turning dark brown," she said.

Finally, Ms. Boston called Mr. Ismaili's company.

"We sanded down the whole deck, applied a cleaner and brightener, put on the best stain we could find, a couple of boards at a time, wiped it down, sealed it and let it dry," Mr. Ismaili said.

The work was not simple or inexpensive — about \$4 a square foot for the entire process, Mr. Ismaili said. "It's almost like refinishing a piece of furniture."

But Ms. Boston is, at last, happy with the result.

"It's unbelievable," she said. "It looks like the original deck."

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