

# Canadians love their decks

Our love affair with decks is very understandable. Decks allow us to maximize our outdoor life. Decks expand our house size at a lower cost. Decks can help us take advantage of views, or protect our privacy. Decks reduce the amount of grass we have to cut. Decks are a great place for the barbecue, pets, kids and construction problems.

Wood rot, water leaks and slippery surfaces are but a few of the more common deck problems. Poor choice of materials and poor construction practices tend to make decks a source of constant repair and problems. But new materials and techniques allow the construction of decks which can be regarded as permanent structures with minimal maintenance.

Wooden decks have become more popular than ever with the introduction of pressure-treated lumber. Pressure-treated lumber is impregnated with various types of salts which prevent wood decay. This type of lumber is available in various grades, from lumber that can be in contact with the ground to appearance-trade lumber which can be used for the most visible portion of the structure.

The use of pressure-treated lumber by itself is not enough to guarantee the quality of the deck. Well-built decks are characterized by the following:

- A deck may not need a foundation as hefty as that of a house, but it does need a good foundation. The best foundations

for decks tend to be poured concrete footings with metal post saddles. Small decks or those low to the ground can be built on concrete pier blocks.

- If the deck is fastened to the house, it must be flashed in a way that will prevent water entry to the house. Nails and other fasteners, as well as flashing, joist hangers and hardware must be resistant to water and weather. Under normal conditions, hot-dipped galvanized material is a good choice. If your deck is near saltwater, you may want to use stainless steel.

- Some pressure-treated lumber has the capacity of withstanding soil contact for 40 years and more, but it will most likely last longer if it is kept out of the soil.

- Pressure-treated lumber will tend to crack if not coated with a water sealer. The sealer should be applied at the time of construction, and every three years.

- Decks built with non-pressure-treated lumber, including decks built with cedar, require periodic treatment with a wood preservative. Old-growth cedar, "heartwood" lumber, has a relatively high resistance to rot. But most of the cedar we find in the lumberyard is relatively young "sapwood" and will start to rot in a few years unless it is treated at construction time and every three to five years afterwards. Even if you find and can afford top-quality cedar, the application of a wood preservative will help protect your investment, and a quickly disappearing wood product.

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