

# Advising Customers on Deck Protection

**A**t the earliest hint of spring, homeowners will start thinking about how to stain or re-stain their decks. Selecting stain is an important decision, but the preparation and maintenance of the product must also be part of the discussion. And, with growing interest in more environmentally friendly stains, dealers will also be asked how to stain in a more environmentally friendly way.

For many years, staining wood meant working with toxic solvents and harmful fumes. But to meet growing demand for more “green” alternatives, environmentally friendly wood stains have become more prominent on the store shelves.

## Preparing for Deck Season—Understand Wood

Advising customers on deck protection necessitates an understanding of wood, its properties and its needs. Not



● Sanding the deck

all customers need in-depth detail, but it pays to invest in educating your staff on wood and staining so that they can pass on the do's and don'ts of finishing wood. A little attention to detail at the start will make a huge difference in



● Spraying the deck.

beauty and performance of any product you sell. Ask your wood stain supplier to run an education seminar for your employees with a certified wood science and treatment presentation, and the ability to get some hands-on experience staining wood first-hand in the store.

At these educational sessions, your staff can learn important information that keeps customers from experiencing unforeseen, avoidable situations. For example, selecting wood and knowing what type of wood they're about to stain is important. Where is the deck located, in direct sun, in mostly shade? These are all helpful indicators as to how they should stain and protect wood.

## “Green Deck” Staining Tips

No matter what the stain, traditional or more eco-friendly, durability is likely your customer's first concern. They want to know: How long will the stain last? Granted this is important, but serviceability is even more important or at least equal in value.

What this means is that you want deck coatings to wear gracefully allowing for easy maintenance and recoats so maintenance is always a pleasant experience. Durability and ease of maintenance are compounded exponentially when the initial preparation and staining are done well.

For customers that want to re-stain or start from scratch, here are some tried and true tips to educate your customer on how to prepare and coat the wood so they have great results.

## Select a Waterborne Stain that Penetrates Wood

Traditionally, wood stains used oil-based solvents to coat the wood. For water

repellency, these oil-based solvents often contain paraffins, which quickly break down with exposure to sunlight and heat.

The move to water-based stains combines the benefits of both oil- and water-based coatings, using water as the vehicle to get oil penetration deep into the wood for durable protection. These eco-stains don't just sit on top ready to be chipped or scraped away.

### Clean and Rinse the Deck

Apply a biodegradable deck cleaner to remove any buildup or mold/mildew. Rinse the deck off with a hose (making sure plants surrounding the deck are covered), and let the deck dry thoroughly, making sure all signs of the previous coating are gone.

### Sanding Is Worth the Time

This step may be time-consuming, but is worth the effort. An orbital sander with 60-80 grit paper should do the trick



### ● Staining the deck.

to create a level, consistently porous surface that will absorb more stain, resulting in a better wood finish.

### Use Less Stain and Apply with Spray, then Brush

Using less is always more for the environment. To reduce the need for multiple coats, wood stains now come in "one-coat" formulations that penetrate deep into the wood to repel condensed water while allowing water vapor to escape. It's best to apply the stain with a garden sprayer followed by "back-brushing" to ensure an even, saturated coat.

## Maintenance Pays Off

How long should your deck stain last? That's a common question, and it depends on the stain and preparation as described here, but two to four years is the average. To extend the life of your wood stain, clean the surface properly and apply a maintenance coat if the deck no longer repels water.

Yet, no matter the wood or pre-treatment for your deck, it's important to protect your investment. Now, homeowners can get high-quality protection with the added bonus of low-VOC, low-toxic wood stain products that can be applied in one or two coats. If you ask customers the right wood questions and are able to customize your recommendations based on understanding wood and its properties, you'll gain a satisfied loyal customer. ■



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### ● A final deck look.