

Composite Decking Has Come a Long Way



Get Connected

Get Inspired

When composite decking first hit the market around 25 years ago, it was heralded as the best thing to happen to deck building since decking screws. That enthusiasm was short-lived, however, as some significant flaws in the material began to surface after it was in circulation a few years. The most common complaints were that it scratched easily, sagged, and warped over time, and in some cases, developed mold and mildew problems. In recent years, additional setbacks have been discovered in product lines from a variety of manufacturers, while other composite decking products have flourished and continue to push the envelope closer to traditional wood decking. By buying from reputable manufacturers and following their instructions for installation and care, homeowners who choose composite for their new deck can rest easy knowing they're getting one of the best decking products on the market.

Research Composite Deck Brands Carefully

Because cheaply manufactured composite decks can still present homeowners with a host of problems, it's very important that you research the company who makes your decking before making your purchase. In May 2009, for example, a line of Veranda composite decking from Louisiana-Pacific was recalled because the "decking can prematurely deteriorate and unexpectedly break. Consumers can fall through broken decking and suffer serious injuries." That's no small defect. On the other hand, it does say something about the manufacturer's willingness to come forward and publicly disclose the finding. With such a new product, these types of setbacks were inevitable. Often, it's a good idea not only to purchase your deck from a trusted brand name, but also a product line that's been around for several years. Lab testing is no substitute for decking performance in the real world.

Trex Decking

If you're looking for a trusted brand to begin your search, Trex Decking is a great

candidate. Trex Decking has been around since the very beginning. They've put 25 years of research, development, and practical experience into their product and stand by it accordingly. Trex Decking might cost you a little more per linear foot to install than a new, no-name brand, but their 25 year, transferable, limited warranty speaks for itself. That's a better warranty than you'll get on a wood deck, even cedar and redwood, by about 15 years.

The Composite Decking Explosion

Another early complaint with composite was the limited choices that were offered when it came to style and color. Again, advancing technology and a maturing industry have made shopping for composite decking material a real pleasure. The largest, well-known composite deck companies offer several different product lines and colors to choose from. Trex Decking, for example, currently has four different lines that, all together, come in 12 different colors. Add to that advances in stamping and rolling technology that bring out imitation wood grain and texture on the boards, and you can now purchase composite decking that is virtually indistinguishable from the real thing.

Composite Decking: Manufacturers' Recommendations

For starters, never use it as a structural joist or beam. Because it is made from 50% recycled plastics and 50% wood fiber, it just isn't stiff enough to support a lot of weight without bending and sagging over time. That same property means you'll have to include more joists into your deck blueprints than if you go with wood. The sagging that homeowners complained of early on is best addressed by providing more support. With closer joists and rails to give decking and railings more support, sagging is reduced to almost nothing. And finally, while you'll never need to stain or paint your deck again, you'll want to clean your composite deck several times a year, and be sure to wipe up greasy or oily spills as soon as they happen. Being diligent about taking care of your decking is the key to its longevity.

Deck Contractors' Recommendations

If you're interested in having a composite deck installed, talk to an experienced deck builder about getting your deck project underway. Since composite decks are fast becoming the norm instead of an oddity, it's rare that you'll find a deck builder inexperienced in working with this exciting new decking material. One good tip to follow is to consider which wood and wood grain most appeals to you. Composite decks can imitate an exotic softwood that would make for a poor wood deck. On the other hand, it may make little sense to choose a composite deck with a cedar look, as this natural wood is the species of choice for wood decking. ■

Marcus Pickett is a professional freelance writer for the home remodeling industry. He has published more than 600 articles on both regional and national topics within the home improvement industry.