

Swabbing the Decks



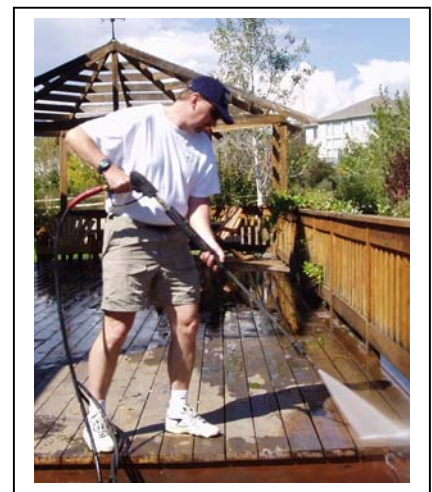
By Rick Bunzel

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One of the annual rituals for homeowners is cleaning and sealing their deck. Colorado's weather is especially hard on wooden decks; hot dry summers mixed with winter's cold can cause your deck to dry and splinter. The deterioration is gradual as decks will simply get dirty and the surface will become much rougher much sooner. Splinters and warped boards are a common problem with wood decks.

Wooden decks can last for many years with proper maintenance. Deck maintenance is a three-part process: remove any old stains or coatings, clean the wood, and seal it against weather damage. Neglected decks, provided the wood is free of rot, can be renewed with a little extra work. The first step would be to countersink all the nails and screws. My preference is to use screws as they have more holding power over nails. The next step is to sand the deck. The best tool is to rent a floor sander. If you're not familiar with floor sanders, ask for an orbital sander. If you're familiar with sanders then go for the belt sander. A belt sander is more powerful but any mistakes are more obvious. Use medium grit sandpaper initially and finish with fine grit sandpaper.

For most decks a pressure washer will provide all the preparation needed. I rented one for \$40 at a local rental shop. These units are powerful enough to strip paint off the deck or siding so you will want to practice in an area that is not so noticeable. I saw good results holding the tip 8"-12" away and at an angle to the deck. If you hold the tip too close the wood surface will have a frayed look. Since my deck had a latex based stain at one time, I chose to also apply a deck preparation agent that had oxalic acid in it. Since this is pretty powerful you will want to use eye and glove protection as well as old shoes. An alternative to acid is TSP (Trisodium Phosphate).



Let the deck dry completely before you apply sealer. With all the rain we have had lately I had to wait two weeks until the deck was dry enough to apply the sealer. I prefer a clear sealer with a little bit of color in it. I find this is easier to renew and it lets the natural beauty of the wood to show through. The previous owners of my home choose a water-based product with a lot of color in it. Unfortunately the surface wasn't prepared all that well and it started flaking off in high traffic areas.

Prior to selecting a sealer/stain I consulted Consumer Reports. I was surprised to see that the most advertised deck stains rated the worst over the last several tests Consumer Reports did. Opaque stains will last longer than clear stains. I decided to go with Olympic Maximum Waterguard Clear that I got from a local home improvement store. Since I had

a gazebo and about 50' of railing I decided to use my sprayer to apply the sealer. We also used a roller and brush for areas that couldn't be sprayed.

As with all projects you should take all the necessary safety precautions. Unfortunately, I didn't follow my own advice and fell while spraying my gazebo. I want to thank Boulder Rural Fire Department's Rob O'Donnell and the crew from B shift for coming to my aid. I separated my shoulder, and that second coat will just have to wait a couple of weeks while I heal.

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Mountain View Property Inspections. If you would like to know more about your home go to **WWW.MVPinspection.com** If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or MVPInspection@comcast.net