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DIFFICULTY

Moderate

TIME ESTIMATE

Three to five days

TOOLS

Broom  
Leaf blower  
Stiff-bristled push broom  
Extendable paint rollers and heads  
Paint brushes

MATERIALS

Water  
Medium-grit sandpaper  
Plastic sheeting  
Bleach-free deck cleaner/brightener  
Deck-specific stain and sealer (or a combined product, such as a semitransparent stain)

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Safety goggles  
Mask

Darker stains provide greater protection against ultraviolet rays, which can cause wood fibers to break down and turn gray over time.

# Stain and Maintain Your Wooden Deck

By Danielle Taylor



A well-treated deck can serve you for years with the proper maintenance.

**A**s much as you love your cabin's interior rooms, its outdoor living spaces are sure to become some of your favorite aspects of living there. Barbecues, bonfires and backyard get-togethers take on a whole new dimension of relaxation when you're surrounded by nature instead of suburbia, and it's easy to spend your summer whiling away the time as you watch the fireflies come out.

However, without proper preparation and regular upkeep, your deck may become a rundown eyesore, causing more headaches than it's worth. Boards can rot, stains can fade, and sealers can fail, leaving an unsightly mess. Fortunately, keeping your deck in great shape is pretty straightforward, and spring or summer is a great time to tackle this project. Here's your step-by-step guide to keeping your deck in its best condition.

Sherwin-Williams photo



## 1 Assess Your Deck's Condition

Test your boards to see if they require any new product application. Sprinkle some water around different spots of your deck, especially areas that receive direct sunlight or are showing signs of wear and tear. If the water beads up, your seal is still intact; if it soaks in, you need to reseal.



A power sander can generate an even surface for your stain.

## 2 Prepare Materials for Cleaning

Remove your deck furniture. Going with the direction of the grain, sand down any rough patches or areas with uneven sealant to create a uniform work surface. Use a broom to sweep away sawdust, then use your leaf blower across the entire surface of your deck to thoroughly remove any leaves, pine needles or dirt that may remain. Pay special attention to the gaps between your boards.



## 3 Protect Surrounding Vegetation

Your plants may suffer from exposure to the fumes and chemicals that may be present in your finishing materials. Wet them down before you start to apply any cleaners, stains or sealants, and cover them with clear plastic until the fumes begin to subside.

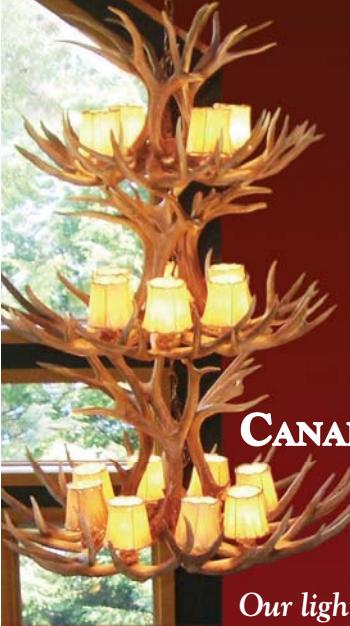
## 4 Apply Cleaner

Because bleach (sodium hypochlorite) can break the bonds between wood fibers and destroy the integrity of your wood, choose a bleach-free deck cleaner/brightener to revive your planks. Check the manufacturer's instructions before you begin; some need the deck to be wet before application, while others require a dry surface.



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# tip

- Check the weather before you begin: You will want at least two days of dry weather between 50 and 90 degrees.
- Always wear safety goggles and a face mask when working around chemicals and stains.
- Wear old clothes consisting of a long-sleeved shirt, pants and closed-toed shoes.
- Spread out any touchup rags to allow them to dry completely, as piles of rags soaked in volatile finishes can combust and start a flash fire.
- Equipment soiled with a latex-based stain can be cleaned with soap and water; oil-based stains require paint thinner or mineral spirits.



Sherwin-Williams photos

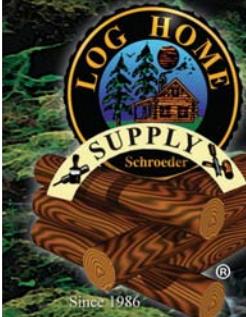
## 5 Apply Stain and Sealer

Ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause as much damage to your deck as excessive moisture: The sun's effect breaks down the lignin in your wood and causes it to gray over time. A colored stain will slow this deterioration, with darker colors providing more protection. You can choose to apply stain and sealer separately, or use a combined product for compatibility and ease of application.

Unless the manufacturer's instructions indicate otherwise, apply your stain or sealer in thin, even coats using an extendable paint roller or sprayer. Have a friend

follow behind you to spread out any puddles. Use a paintbrush to work stain or sealant between cracks and gaps, into corners and along railings.

Allow the product to dry completely between coats. If you use two distinct products for your stain and sealer, follow the manufacturer's guidelines for product compatibility and time between applications.



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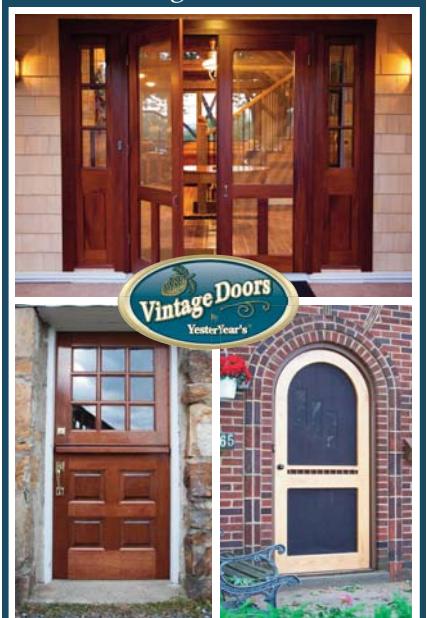
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## CHOOSING YOUR DECKING MATERIALS

When considering your decking options, it's important to keep quality in mind. Knotty softwood boards may be cheaper and just as strong as more expensive options, but you'll wish you had spent the extra money as sap oozes up out of the burls every hot day and gets all over your clothes.

To determine the best materials for your region and climate, solicit suggestions from a few local building contractors. The right wood for your deck can depend on your area's temperature fluctuations, precipitation levels, amount of sunlight and more.

If you want to minimize the amount of maintenance your deck will require, consider composite decking, which combines natural and manufactured materials, such as sawdust and recycled plastic, for about \$5 per square foot. The end result is a durable product that requires significantly less upkeep than wood (though it still requires some care) and offers a realistic wood profile. Like wood, composite decking will fade with time, but it resists rotting, warping and insect infestations.

Many homeowners who do choose wood favor an exotic variety, such as ipe or tigerwood, for their decks. For a list of options you may not have considered, visit [countrysbestcabins.com/exotic-woods-for-log-homes-decks](http://countrysbestcabins.com/exotic-woods-for-log-homes-decks).



Scar-like knots are hard to seal, so invest in quality lumber upfront.

Benjamin Taylor photo



6

## Perform Regular Maintenance

Following rain storms, check your deck to see if the water beads or absorbs. Depending on what products you used, you may have to reapply your stain and/or sealer every one to three years, but you can repair susceptible spots in between full reapplications. Simply sand down to the wood, and reapply your product(s) using the aforementioned five-step process.

Bear Creek Lumber photo

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