



Choosing Materials for your Deck

The choice of materials for a deck is much more complex than it was 10 years ago. At that time, there were relatively few choices available beyond real wood. Now, there are seemingly infinite choices available, and companies spend millions of dollars in marketing these products in order to convince you that their decking or railing can do everything except cure the common cold.

How do you decide what to put on your deck? While we have a few products that we recommend, there is no one product that is the perfect fit for everyone. This brochure gives a general overview of what's available, and what you should consider when making your choices. ☺

LOW-MAINTENANCE DECKING

After working with numerous synthetic decking products during the past 15 years, we've concluded that there is not a silver bullet for the Low-MX decking industry. Some products have established themselves as industry leaders, but every synthetic decking product has strengths (which the brochures are quick to point out) and weaknesses (the brochures are usually silent here). Here are some general categories of decking and some characteristics of each. ↻

Composite Decking



Trex was the first composite deckboard (first produced over 20 years ago), and is still the household name of the industry, but other companies, such as Timbertech, Evergrain, and Fiberon have established themselves in the last several years as leading composite manufacturers.

Composite deckboards require no staining or sealing, and are usually warranted for 10-25 years against insects, rotting, and warping (among other things). On the downside, they are susceptible to mold and mildew and usually fade. Scratches also show up quickly. In addition, household spills (BBQ sauce, grease) are difficult to get out. ↻

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Try not to be overly selective about color and style. Instead, we recommend finding a good quality product and choosing from among colors that the product offers. Occasionally, we've had customers who insisted on a particular color, and we had to use a product that was much more expensive and in some cases inferior to the product we would have normally offered. Many of the customers were frustrated with the product that they ended up getting.

***Do your homework.** Don't rely on a product's brochure to tell you everything you need to know about a product. Research the product—the internet is usually a good place to start, especially web forums. While no product will leave every customer happy, you'll be able to see if a product has had serious defects across the board. Also, check the warranty on a product. The difference between the brochure claims and what the warranty actually covers can sometimes be staggering.*

***There's more to a deck than its initial appearance.** Remember that you want your deck to look and perform well beyond the first big summer cookout. For example: If a deckboard scratches easily, what will your deck look like after moving chairs back and forth hundreds of times over the course of a year? Another good example: hidden fasteners. Hidden fasteners have overwhelmed the market—after all, who wants to see screw heads if you don't have to? Yet face-screwed decking, if done well, offers structural advantages over most hidden fastener systems—it produces a more solid connection between the decking and the framing, reducing the chances of deckboards becoming loose and squeaky over time. ↻*

Hardwood Decking



Hardwoods have proven themselves to be the most durable decking product available (both wood and low-maintenance). They are extremely dense, have a strong resistance to insects, and are virtually fireproof. While hardwoods do require maintenance to maintain their color and texture, it is much less than treated pine, and over time the amount of maintenance needed decreases. Hardwoods remain structurally sound for decades, even with no maintenance. When properly cared for, hardwoods have a beauty that exceeds that of imitation hardwood decking (Trex Brasilia, TimberTech Earthwood).

Ipe (pronounced ee-pay) is the most popular hardwood available. Hardwoods such as cumuru, teak and garapa have many of the same features of ipe, but are slightly less expensive.

The downside of hardwoods: higher labor and material costs make a hardwood deck more expensive than a vinyl deck of the same size. However, we normally are able to install a hardwood deck w/aluminum railing for less than a composite deck with composite railing. ↪

Vinyl Decking

Vinyl decking is relatively new on the scene, but has quickly gained popularity among deck builders and homeowners. AZEK (formerly Procell) is probably the company that has done the most in popularizing vinyl decking, although other companies, such as Trex and Timbertech, have also crossed over into the vinyl market successfully.



Vinyl deckboards have established themselves as being more “low-maintenance” than composite boards. Because they are non-porous, they have a strong resistance to mold and mildew, and don’t soak up spills like composite boards do. They also have a stronger resistance to scratching. However, vinyl deckboards are usually more slippery than composites, especially in heavy traffic areas. They are also prone to fading in heavy sun exposure. If a customer doesn’t have a strong preference, we recommend AZEK for low-maintenance decking, but it’s good to understand all of your options before making a decision. ↪

LOW-MAINTENANCE RAILING

We’ve found that customers are usually pickier about railing than decking, and for good reason. It’s the most visible element of a deck. It contributes significantly to a deck’s safety. The choice of railing (specifically the baluster) can also affect the view of your surroundings

Here are the three general categories of railing:



Vinyl Railing

Vinyl is the most economical choice for low-maintenance railing. Vinyl railing requires no staining or sealing, and generally needs only an occasional power-wash to restore its color. It also has a relatively strong resistance to scratches. However, it does lose its luster over time, and can get chalky. ↪

Composite Railing



Composite railing would include brands such as AZEK Rail, Timbertech Radiance Rail, and Trex Artisan Rail. Most of these brands are made of composite material with a hard shell PVC coating to prevent mold and mildew. They also have a bulky look which is very popular.

Probably the biggest downside to composite systems is the cost—upgrading to a composite rail from a vinyl or aluminum can add as much as two to three thousand for a large deck project. Another negative—if you scratch through the PVC coating, there is nothing that can be done to restore it to its original look (except buying a new piece of railing). 🐾



Aluminum Railing

If a customer prefers something more high-end than vinyl, we usually recommend an aluminum railing system. While aluminum is more expensive than vinyl, it is closer to vinyl than composite in price, and also more durable than vinyl or composite.

Aluminum is a popular choice for railing for the same reasons as being the metal of choice for airplanes—it is strong and durable, lightweight, and naturally rust-free. It also blends well with any type of wood or vinyl exterior component (decking, siding, trim, etc.).

Aluminum railing has a powder-coated finish, which means the paint is baked on to prevent peeling and chipping. While a powder-coated finish can be scratched, it can be easily restored to its original look with touch-up paint. 🐾

WOOD DECKING/RAILING

Most of our customers prefer a low-maintenance product—they are tired of painting, sealing, staining, and all of the things that are necessary to preserve a wood deck.

However, there are many advantages to wood. Because it has been used for decades on thousands of decks, it's easier to predict how wood will perform. Wood also has a natural beauty that can't be duplicated by anything artificial.

Here are some of the choices that are available in wood:

Pressure-treated Yellow Pine

Pressure-treated pine is the most economical decking available. It's plentiful, easy to install, and is proven to have a long life. There are a few drawbacks to treated pine—it requires a substantial amount of maintenance, and is very prone to splintering, cracking, and warping (even if properly maintained). ↻



Red Cedar

Red cedar is in many ways superior to yellow pine—it has a beautiful color and aroma, is more dimensionally stable (i.e., doesn't warp), and is almost splinter-free. Cedar is a good choice if you or your children plan to spend a lot of time on the deck barefoot, as with a pool deck.

The biggest disadvantage of cedar is that it doesn't have the longevity of other types of wood, especially in more humid areas such as the South or Northeast (drier areas such as Colorado tend to be more forgiving towards cedar). Cedar does require some maintenance to preserve its appearance and prolong its life. ↻



Stump's Quality Decks

builds decks, porches, and other projects for homeowners in the Lancaster, York, Harrisburg, Reading, Chester County, and surrounding areas. Stump's also builds decks for some of the finest homebuilders in the South Central PA area, including Keystone Custom Homes, E.G. Stoltzfus Homes, Custom Home Group, and Perry L. Cisney Custom Builder.

If you are interested in a deck, please call us or email to request a free estimate.



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