



# How To: Deck Maintenance

Decks can be a great way to enjoy the outdoors and fresh air while at home. However, they are also subject to harsh seasons and weather. This means they will require some maintenance throughout the year. There are many ways to keep your deck looking it's best, but three of them are key! Those three are washing, sanding, and staining or sealing. This article will walk through each of those projects.

## **WASHING**

### Why?

The main reason for washing your deck is to rinse away any residue build up from fall and winter. If left for too long this residue can lead to mold and mildew, which can cause the boards to rot.

### When?

Early spring is the best time of year to wash your deck.

### How?

Using a pressure washer is the best and most effective way to clean a deck. The suggested PSI (pressure per square inch) for this is between 2000 and 3000. Before starting it is recommended to remove any

old stain or paint from the deck. Once ready to begin washing deck it is a good idea to test it in an inconspicuous spot on the deck to ensure it does not damage the wood.

A 2000 or 2500 PSI pressure washer would work great for this.



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## ***SANDING***

### ***Why?***

When pressure washing, the wood fibers of the various components of the deck often raise as they expand with water. Once the deck is dry, these fibers often remain raised and can cause splinters. This is one of the main reasons to sand your deck. Another is that sanding your deck will help it absorb stain or sealer.

### ***When?***

Due to the wood fibers remaining raised, it is best to sand the deck after pressuring washing it. However, make sure the deck is completely dry before starting the sanding process.

### ***How?***

Before starting the sanding process it is very important to prep the surface of the deck. This includes making sure all fasteners are driven below the surface of the wood as well as addressing any splinters or gouges. As well as using 20 to 36 grit sandpaper to remove any leftover stain or paint that did not come off with the pressure washer. If wood filler is used to fill gouges, you must wait for it to completely dry and harden before you begin sanding.

When sanding a deck there are three areas of focus and each one often requires different tools and techniques. These three areas are; the deck surface, stairs, and railings.

### ***Deck Surface***

With the deck surface, many people believe the goal is to get it as smooth as possible. In fact, that is not correct. If the deck surface becomes too smooth, this is usually the result sanding with 100 grit paper or finer, the pores will begin to close down. This will hinder the absorption of any stain or sealer you may want to apply in the future. For this reason it is recommended to finish with 60 or 80 grit paper.

An orbital floor sander is the ideal tool for this portion of the deck.

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## Stairs

The stairs will be treated the same as the deck surface by using 60-80 grit sandpaper. The only difference will be the tool you use, since an orbital sander will not fit on most stairs.

The best tool for this portion of the deck is a belt sander.

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## Railings

This is a vital part since the railings are the most visible portion of the deck. Along with that, they are frequently touched which means a poorly sanded railing could lead to splinters. With that in mind it is best to start with 80 grit and then move up to 100 grit if you would like it smoother. Just as before, if the surface is too smooth the pores will not be as absorbent when applying stain or sealer. When done sanding the railings it is best to vacuum up or blow off any dust created during sanding and then wipe the railings down with a tack cloth before applying stain or sealer.

For this portion the best tool will be a palm sander.



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# ***STAINING or SEALING***

## Why?

Staining or sealing the deck helps protect it from certain elements. While they both prevent water from penetrating the deck boards, sealer does not provide protection from UV rays due to it being a clear coat. Since stain is dark, it does offer protection from those harmful UV rays that can cause boards to dry out leading to cracking and splintering. A darker stain can last up to 5 times longer than sealer, which requires yearly reapplication, when applied correctly.

## When?

Late spring to early summer is the ideal time of year to apply the deck's coating.

## How?

Before beginning to apply the coating there are a two things to watch for in the upcoming weather forecast. First, check that forecast to ensure several dry days with no rain are ahead. Second, it is best if the temperature at the time of application, as well as drying, is between 50-90 degrees fahrenheit.

Once a date is selected that meets both of those requirements, it is time to prep the deck. Prep work for the coating is not too difficult. At this point the deck will need to be vacuumed or swept clean. After using painter's tape to cover up anything that the coating is not wanted on, it is time to apply the stain or sealer. When applying the coating it is best to use a natural bristle paint brush and not a foam one. This style of brush helps get the product in all of deck's grooves and in between the boards. The general rule of thumb is to apply 2 coats of stain. However, if dealing with an extremely dense hardwood, it may only be able to absorb one coat. As far as sealer goes, one coat normally does the trick. But if a second coat is desired it is recommended to wait at least 24 hours before applying it.

We highly recommend your local Pellicci Ace Hardware for these products!