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Content Guidelines	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QmR9PTd-JANCHsiQg9S2tJapdpwbtX1mDa2YRdyYgY4/edit?usp=sharing
Recommended URL Structure	https://www.deckstainhelp.com/how-to-stain-a-deck/
Meta Title	How to Stain a Deck for Best Results
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A Layperson's Guide to **Staining a Deck** Like a Pro

The Quick Answer: **How to Stain a Deck**

In truth, there is no “best” answer for **how to properly stain a deck**. The process begins by choosing a stain suited to your deck's current condition and your region's climate. Next, you'll choose the correct combination of application tools for the job.

Although some solid stains provide substantial coverage, flaws and imperfections in the surface will likely remain visible at the end of your project. That's why I tell people not to cut corners when preparing wood—the prep process is critical. I like to start by completely removing any existing paint or stain, replacing any boards with severe damage, lightly sanding the surface to remove any splinters if needed, thoroughly cleaning/stripping with a deck cleaner/stain stripper, applying a wood brightener, and allowing the surface to dry.

To achieve a quality finish, the stain must deeply penetrate the wood. The key is to have the wood absorb the maximum amount of stain possible and remove any excess. Always carefully review the instructions of the product manufacturer. Lastly, allow the deck to dry completely before walking on it.

1st, Here Are the Tools and Materials You'll Need

Wondering **how to apply stain to decking**? Check out this [posting](#) regarding stain applicators.

Being properly equipped is critical for getting the job done right, so review the following applicator options.

Deck Stain Brushes

For applying stain to edges and other hard-to-reach areas, a wood stain brush is the best choice. To apply oil-based stains, sealers, or toners, choose a China bristle brush, which is composed of natural, animal-based material that provides an even finish. For large areas, a 4 to 6-inch China bristle brush allows you to easily “backbrush” and achieve a uniform finish.

Deck Stain Pads Applicators

Applicator pads or mops are great tools for easily staining large areas. For example, Padco and Shur-Line make quality stain pads of different sizes with replaceable pads that get the job done much quicker. Padco stain pads absorb plenty of stain, which makes them great for large areas. Consider the 5-gallon Wooster Wide Boy Buckets for holding the stain during application.

Insider Tip: The deck stain pads made by Shur-Line and Padco are among the best in the market today!

Deck Stain Flooring Brushes

Flooring brushes that attach to threaded poles have recently appeared in the realm of deck staining and have shown promise, particularly with clear, transparent, or semi-transparent products.

Insider Tip: Buying a larger 14” Floor Staining Brush will make staining your horizontal deck surface a breeze. An average 500-square-foot deck floor can be stained in 30 minutes.

Paint Rollers for Decks

Often composed of foam or polystyrene fibers, paint rollers are another option for staining your deck. Wide paint rollers are useful for covering large surface areas in a short time.

Paint rollers are less suitable for coating hard-to-reach areas and may waste stain, as excess liquid often drains through the cracks. Rollers generally hold less stain than pads and are not suitable for use with transparent or semi-transparent deck stain products.

Paint rollers vary in thickness based on the “nap.” Rollers with a 3/8 to 1/2-inch nap are best for rougher deck surfaces; otherwise, those with either a 1/4 or 3/16-inch nap are fine.

Deck Stain Sprayers

Pump-up style deck stain sprayers are effective for use with transparent or semi-transparent stains. Models such as those made by Chapin feature three adjustable nozzle settings that work

well. Airless sprayers are another option. **Despite being more expensive, these work well for most stains, but some people find them more challenging to use at first. Check out these [handy spraying tips](#).**

Insider Tip:

The best tools for applying stain vary according to the type of stain you are using. “Paint-style” rollers are your best option for solid-color stains. However, they are generally discouraged for “thinner” stains because they may create splatters that make it very difficult to apply evenly.

2nd, Pick Out the Right Deck Stain

What is the best deck stain to choose? It depends. You should choose a stain that is best suited for your deck and environment. Some of the variable factors include your climate, the condition of the wood, and the availability of certain stains based on the VOC regulations in your state.

Color and Transparency

The following three types are the most commonly used.

- **Transparent:** Having a very light tint, transparent stains clearly show the natural grains in the wood (and any imperfections).
- **Semi-transparent:** With more color options, semi-transparent stains offer more flexibility, such as if you are trying to match the home’s existing trim.
- **Solid:** Similar to the texture of paint, solid stains create a uniform coating that hides the wood grain.

Insiders Tip:

Traditionally, semi-transparent and semi-solid stains have been my favorite because they penetrate the wood very well. In recent years, increasingly stringent environmental regulations related to volatile organic compounds (VOCs) have emerged. As a result, many manufacturers of semi-transparent stains altered their long-proven formulas to comply with the laws, which has resulted in products that poorly penetrate the surface.

Durability

In general, solid stains are the longest-lasting, and transparent stains will require more frequent reapplication. For example, solid stains should last roughly 2 to 3 years on walking surfaces and 4 to 6 years on vertical surfaces and trim. Fully transparent stains often need to be applied annually. Semi-transparent stains offer a good balance between the two.

Condition of Deck

Decks that are only a few years old will work well with transparent, semi-transparent, or solid stains. Older decks with more wear are best coated with a semi-transparent or solid stain. For new decks, check out my [posting](#), which explains how long to wait before staining and the surface prep details for new wood.

Climate

Decks in hot and dry climates need strong UV protection, and regions with heavy rainfall need to resist moisture and stop the development of mold or mildew.

[See My Recommended Deck Stains](#)

A Concise Guide to Different Stain Types

Water-Based vs Oil-Based

In response to environmental restrictions regarding VOCs, the number of water-based stains has dramatically increased. The most stringent states include California, Connecticut, Delaware, D.C., Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. Parts of these states also have stringent regulations: Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Virginia.

Water-based stains generally lack the capability of deeply penetrating the surface like an oil-based product can. Some benefits of water-based stains include being eco-friendly, resistant to mold and mildew, and usually dry quickly. Oil-based products penetrate and result in a natural-looking finish; however, they take longer to dry and are more odorous.

Solid Color Stains

Known for providing superior UV protection, solid color stains are mostly water-based. Because of their “paint-like” coated finish, solid stains help mask flaws. After applying a solid stain to the deck, it’s unlikely that you could transition to a transparent stain again.

Semi-Solid Deck Stains

Both water and oil-based types of semi-solid stain exist, but significantly fewer manufacturers produce them. Like solid stains, semi-solids hide most of the wood grain and offer excellent UV protection.

Insider Tip: If using a semi-solid stain—grab an oil-based option.

Semi-Transparent Deck Stain

Available in water or oil-based formulas, semi-transparent stains offer the “best of both worlds.” Semi-transparent stains will allow for the natural wood grain to show and provide adequate UV protection.

Transparent Deck Stains

Because they have very little pigment, transparent stains create a natural wood finish. You will typically need to stain your deck each year if you choose a transparent stain.

Clear Deck Sealers

Clear deck finishes are easy to apply but are primarily used for repelling water. They offer very minimal UV protection and will need to be applied every 6 to 12 months.

3rd, Choose the Right Day and Time

The time needed to complete the project will vary based on the size of your deck, but typically, I like to set aside a weekend. If you’re replacing damaged boards and performing substantial sanding work, set aside two days.

Check the weather forecast for the upcoming days for any chances of rain within 48 hours. The ideal temperature range is between 50 and 90 degrees F. Avoid staining during periods of extreme heat or direct sunlight.

Insider Tip: Restore-A-Deck Wood stains allow more leeway when dealing with rainy weather as they can be applied to damp or dry wood. You can even stain the same day as the prep. They can take rain within 4-8 hours after application.

You're Ready, Here's **How to Stain Your Deck**

Wondering **how to properly stain a deck**? Use the following series of steps.

Step 1: Prep Work

Remove all furniture and other belongings from the deck. It is important to remember that old stains, paint, and other imperfections will likely be visible after you stain the surface; thus, always ensure the surface is clean, dry, and smooth. If needed, lightly sand the deck to remove any splinters, moving in the same direction as the wood grain, using 60 to 80-grit sandpaper. Remove all dust and particles by sweeping or using a leaf blower.

Insider Tip: Do not over sand! You want the wood to be porous, not overly smooth, so your deck stain can thoroughly soak in.

Step 2: Clean or Strip Your Deck

Clean or strip your deck using products intended for this purpose and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Apply the appropriate prep products and agitate the surface thoroughly by scrubbing with a firm brush in the same direction as the wood grain.

After scrubbing the surface, wash with moderate pressure using a power washer around 1500 to 2000 psi. Immediately after cleaning or stripping, apply a deck brightener, which is often called a neutralizer. The brightening process helps open the "pores" in the wood and neutralizes any remnants of the cleaning product you previously applied.

Step 3: Use Painter's Tape to Control Where the Stain Goes

Use drop cloths or tarps if necessary for covering any surrounding lawn and garden areas. Painter's tape is an excellent means of protecting siding, trim, or fixtures near the deck.

Step 4: Use a Small Paintbrush or Pad to Stain the Edges

Start by using a small pad or brush to stain railings, spindles, edges, corners, and other tight or hard-to-reach surfaces. Place cardboard on the floor below to catch any drips of stain when working on vertical areas such as railings.

Step 5: Apply the Stain to Large Areas

Start staining the surface areas within 2 feet of the house or other adjacent structures first using a stain pad or large flooring brush. If the manufacturer's instructions suggest applying two coats, use a sprayer to complete the first and then a wide stain pad or brush affixed to a pole for the second coat. **Solid stains are not compatible with pump sprayers; therefore, apply both coats with rollers and brushes.** When doing two coats, follow the manufacturer's dry time instructions in between.

Insider Tip: See [this guide](#) for instructions about applying a second coat for stains that require "wet on wet" application.

Step 6: Stain the Finer Details

Check any edges of the floorboards for stain that appears to be running against the grain, and perform any touch-ups with a brush. Always finish any stairs (steps) last—before exiting the deck.

Step 7: Wait for the Stain to Dry

Allow the stain to dry completely according to the manufacturer's instructions before walking on the deck, which should take approximately between 24 and 48 hours.

Should You Add a Sealer on Top of Your Deck Stain?

Good quality deck stains already function as a sealant; therefore, an additional sealant coat is not necessary. Clear sealers provide very little UV protection and cannot be applied over the top of a deck stain as that will lead to adhesion issues and peeling.

Additional Tips Before You Get Started

- Allow the stain to absorb properly and then remove any excess stain, which will likely dry blotchy or uneven if overapplied.
- Avoid applying stain in direct sunlight because the heat might cause the stain to dry before it fully absorbs into the wood.
- Don't sand new decks because it will create a smoother surface that will prevent the stain from absorbing into the wood. See our [new deck stain article](#) for more tips.
- Buy a little more stain than you think you'll need—just to be sure you won't run out near the end.

- If changing brands, color, or type of stain, always completely remove any existing coatings first and use a deck stain stripper if needed for any stubborn material.

At the end of the day, preparation is king when staining your deck. To reiterate, simply choose a stain appropriate for your deck and climate, use the application tools I recommended, and remember to follow the instructions provided by the stain manufacturer, who is most knowledgeable about the specific product. Your deck will be pristine in no time!

Have Questions? Ask Below, I'll Answer

Have further questions about [how to stain your deck?](#) I encourage you to [comment below](#) in our question-and-answer section or visit our [forum](#). This interactive platform is useful for consumers and industry pros. You can share photos of your work, check out Q&As on [applying stain to decking](#), product reviews, and much more.