

HOME & GARDEN

Building and caring for a deck properly will help you get the most enjoyment out of this addition to your house.



Staff photo by Cindy Burnham

Chapman-Wilson Pools, Spas and Home Improvements built this custom deck for customers in the Baywood subdivision.

Outdoor addition

By Stacy Peterson

Staff writer

The deck season has officially begun.

Since local mosquitos haven't quite ripened their appetite for human flesh and the final dusts of pollen are disappearing, this is the time of the year that North Carolinians love to get out on the backyard deck.

And while decks get us outside and provide a welcome space for grilling and socializing, they can also be a pain in the neck.

Moisture problems from decks can rot wood and siding around the bottoms of doors. The wood itself needs regular protection from the elements, and building a deck can be more complicated than you might imagine.

So here are a few helpful tips and suggestions for people to remember when planning to build a deck or just trying to live with one.

The folks over at Chapman-Wilson Pools, Spas and Home Improvements know a lot about decks.

In fact, they customize decks in all sorts of designs to accommodate spas and other features.

Co-owner David Wilson said the first step to having a great deck is preparation.

First, he said, if you are planning to add a deck, always go to the Internet and make sure the company you want to hire is licensed and carries workers-compensation insurance. That, he said, has been the biggest problem he has encountered. Several of his clients say they hired builders who simply took half of the cost of the projects and never came back, Wilson said.

Second, always get a permit and make sure you check with all of the proper governmental agencies before starting anything. For instance, did you know the location of a septic

tank is crucial to adding a deck?

So are underground utilities and setback requirements within the city limits.

"We run into this so many times," Wilson said. "Also I wouldn't scoop out a spoonful of dirt before checking the underground utilities."

Next, make sure that you are using the best materials, have provided proper gutters and have a good roof overhang to prevent water from splashing from the deck and onto the doors or siding.

"We live in a geographic area prone to mildew," Wilson said. "Simple maintenance is also important."

One of the most recent custom projects Wilson's company designed and built was for a homeowner in the Baywood community.

That deck measures 1,150 square feet and includes two levels and a

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lowered level for the Jacuzzi spa. The deck is free-standing, meaning it is not connected to the home and is anchored with 4-inch posts in concrete.

Tips for success

Tom Price, founder and owner of Tom Price Home Improvement, once researched deck construction and maintenance for a newsletter and offers the following tips and ideas with which he has had success:

■ The graying you see on older decks actually comes from ultraviolet rays from the sun. Some decks may also begin to form mildew. Some people mistake the grayish color for a mildew problem and use the wrong type of cleaner. That only causes more damage. To test for mildew, place a drop of undiluted household bleach on any green or darkened spot. If the spot disappears after a minute or two, you have mildew.

Tip: Use bleach to clean away mildew. Use an acid-based product to clean graying and staining.

■ One of the best formulas for removing mildew is to mix 1 cup of trisodium phosphate (TSP) and 1 cup of household liquid bleach with 1 gallon of water. You can use a nonmetallic, stiff-bristle brush to scrub your deck with the solution. Let it set for 15 minutes, then rinse with water. Always wear rubber gloves and eye protection.

Tip: If your deck is starting to gray, you can buy



This deck is free-standing and is anchored with 4-inch posts in concrete.

Staff photo
by Cindy Burnham

a pre-mixed oxalic acid deck cleaner to do the job. Apply the mix with a rag to one board at a time. Scrub the board with a soft brush. Then allow it to dry, and rinse with water.

■ It's not a bad idea to build a deck so it's free-standing from the house. This will allow the deck framing to be built standing off of the house by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to 1 inch to allow for air to circulate between the house and deck. This also eliminates the need to put holes through the house siding or brickwork.

■ Rain water will bounce off the deck and onto the house's siding or doors. This increases the possibility of rot damage to doors, framing and siding. Building the deck at least a step below door openings will help lessen the problem but is not a cure. Storm doors will help keep the water from infiltrating the floor system. Gutters and rain diverters are also recommended.

■ Trex or other synthetic

deck materials will increase the price of a professionally installed deck by as much as 50 percent to 75 percent. It may last longer, but it is costly.

■ If you have an old, worn deck that still has a solid under-framing, the deck boards can be covered with new PVC planking.

■ For sealing the deck, water sealers are popular, but they usually have to be applied every six months or so for proper protection. Staining the deck will give a longer-lasting finish that should require a new coat only every four or five years.

■ Treated Southern Yellow Pine is the most commonly used material in our area for decks. Paint will not adhere well to a new deck because of the treatment, so the deck shouldn't be painted for about six months. This lumber has a pretty high moisture content and is prone to shrinking, warping, splitting and twisting. If possible, buy material that has been stored

indoors for several weeks and is thoroughly dry. Even so, this lumber will still be prone to problems.

■ Decks require zoning and building permits. A deck adjoining your house is considered part of the house and has to meet the same zoning set-back requirements as any other structure. If you live in the city, call before doing any work.

■ No part of a deck may be built closer than five feet to any part of a septic system, including the tank and drain lines.

■ Most older decks were built under an outdated code that allowed for the deck to be simply nailed to the house. This can lead to big problems when the nails rot or rust away. Current code requires either an independently supported deck or one that is bolted completely through the house floor system band or foundation.

Staff writer Stacy Peterson can be reached at petersons@fayettevillenc.com or 323-4848, ext. 384.