



How to Finish Cedar

The following information was taken from an article published in the Canadian Homes and Cottages magazine, Issue 2/2005. Original stories and photos by Ken Evans.

Step #1: Choose a deck finish that has proven itself effective through independent scrutiny.

Step #2: Assess yourself. Do you really have the time and ambition to maintain a wooden deck finish?

Make Sure Your Wood is Ready:

New wood does not respond well to finish nor does wood that has been allowed to turn gray. According to the author, the only independent testing of deck finishes has been *Consumer Reports*, which has been surveying results for almost 10 years. (See below)

A moisture content less than 14 percent and a surface that is absorbent and receptive is required. Even if wood is very wet when purchased, a couple of months of summertime drying should reduce the moisture content sufficiently.

Any milled lumber will have a degree of burnish or "mill glaze" caused by the spinning action of planer blades. This glaze prevents liquid from penetrating deeply and thus peeling is a very large concern. There are chemical mill glaze removers available to increase surface absorbency, or sand your deck before applying a finish. Best results should be obtained by using a 60- or 80-grit disc and a random orbit sander. Not easy work, but worth it.

On the other hand, some people will recommend that a deck sit for a year before applying anything to it which causes other problems. Once wood begins to turn gray, it indicates that surface fibres have loosened. While the wood may be thirsty, it is loose which will cause the finish to flake or peel.

Finishes

Three Main Types of Finish: Clear transparent formulations; semi-transparent products and opaque deck finishes. Clear, transparent finishes attempt to keep new wood looking that way but have little or no protective surface film to protect against UV rays. "*Olympic Water Guard 57560C is the only clear deck finish that has proven at least a good appearance over a three-year period.*"

Tinted semi-transparent products offer greater durability and allow some visibility of the wood grain. "*The current available-in-Canada leader in this category is Sikkens Cetol SRD*".

Opaque, paint-like finishes offer the greatest durability and protection against UV. "*Cabot Decking Stain has claimed the lead in this category for a number of years running.*"

One option to eliminating uneven colour change may be to use 'Lifetime Wood Treatment'. Ken Evans notes that this non-toxic Canadian-made product has been in use for 60 years by the government and homeowners. A powder that you mix with water, this product can be sprayed or brushed on, giving the wood a rich olive-gray color as well as preservative properties to extend a rot-free lifespan.

"Most people are surprised to learn that deck finishes don't do much to extend wood life. Finishing your deck is an aesthetic thing, and that means that natural weathering of wood is okay as long as that gray barn board appearance is acceptable to you."