



Midsummer Inspect and Repair Your Deck

When the weather is warm and dry, it's a good time to give your deck's structure a close inspection. Pay particular attention to any areas within 6 inches of the ground or close to sources of water, such as downspouts and planters.

1. Look for signs of rot. Probe structural members with a flat-blade screwdriver. Begin by checking stairs, especially where the stringers (the saw-tooth notched pieces that support the steps) meet the ground. Also check each perimeter post. If you can push the screwdriver a quarter-inch or more into a suspect area, you probably have rot.

TIP: Areas of rot that are no bigger than a silver dollar can be removed with a chisel, and the hole can be treated with wood preservative. Larger areas may require the structural member to be replaced. Consult a professional carpenter or builder for an estimate for repairs.

2. Inspect the ledger. Using a flashlight underneath your deck, pay special attention to the ledger — that all-important piece of framing that attaches the deck to the house. A damaged ledger is the cause of 90% of all deck collapses.

TIP: The ledger should be attached with lag screws, not just nails. The flashing — the metal cap that covers the top of the ledger and prevents moisture from getting behind the siding — should be free of rust and holes.

3. Check remaining joists, posts, and beams. Check all the hardware underneath, especially joist hangers, and replace any that are seriously rusted. Probe for signs of rot on the posts and joists. If anything looks doubtful, call in a pro to provide an estimate for any needed repairs.

TIP: If a framing member can't be easily removed and replaced, reinforce it. For example, if a joist shows areas of rot, you can add a splint of comparable pressure-treated lumber alongside it, attaching the splint with two or three 3-inch deck screws every 12 inches. Then chisel away the rotten area and paint the raw wood with preservative.

4. Check for cracks or rotten decking boards. Not all cracks are a structural threat, but they'll get worse with time. If you find damage, replace the piece.

5. Check the railing. Give it a good shake to be sure posts are not loose or damaged — loose connections may be remedied by drilling pilot holes and adding galvanized lag screws. Look for cracks that, over time, may have developed around fasteners such as nails or screws. To remedy, remove the fastener and seal the crack with an exterior-grade adhesive. Then, drill a new pilot hole and add a new galvanized deck screw.

Peter Kuczynski **CEO/President**

