



Late Spring Wash the Deck

An unwashed deck is an invitation to mold and mildew, which can cause rot. Here's how to wash your deck.

1. Remove debris from between deck boards using a putty knife. Pay special attention to the areas where deck boards cross the joists — the structural members underneath the decking.

TIP: For a makeshift extension that's a real knee-saver, try pushing the handle of your putty knife into a length of 1/4-inch PVC pipe. Some putty knives squeeze right in. Or buy a pole-type groove and crevice cleaner.

2. Protect all shrubs and plantings. Wet them and cover them with plastic sheeting.

3. Thoroughly sweep the deck.

4. Choose an appropriate cleanser.

5. Clean the deck.

Wood deck: Use a standard deck cleaner and follow its directions. Some require the decking to be wet first. Some don't.

Composite deck: Use a cleaner specifically formulated for composite material. Attack grease and oil stains with a commercial degreaser and detergents.

Vinyl (cellular PVC) deck: You'll only need to use warm water and a mild soap to remove mold, mildew, and dirt.

Wood deck: Use a paint roller, a garden sprayer, or a stiff-bristled brush broom to apply the cleaner. Don't let it pool. Don't let the deck dry until you've scrubbed it clean. Then let it soak according to manufacturer's instructions (usually about 10 minutes). Rinse thoroughly with clean water.

TIP: To clean wood railings: Working from the bottom up, apply the cleaner, scrub, and then rinse. Working from the top down splatters the cleaning solution onto dry wood where it can double-bleach the surface, leaving marks that don't go away when the lower area is washed. Working from the bottom up means you'll be splattering onto a wet surface where the cleaner is diluted, leaving no marks.

Composite deck: Scrub with a soft brush. Do not use a pressure washer — it can permanently damage the decking and will void any warranty. Remove rust and leaf stains with a deck brightener containing oxalic acid. **Vinyl deck:** Scrub in a circular motion using a stiff broom, then rinse thoroughly.⁶ **Let deck dry. Wait two days before sealing.**

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