

Choosing materials for your new decking

Warm weather often gives rise to thoughts about spending time in the great outdoors. Decks can expand outdoor living spaces, mak-

ing them popular home additions. However, when it comes time to map out a deck building plan, individuals may be unsure as to which

deck material will meet their needs. Wood and composite decks are among the most popular choices today, and the popularity of aluminum is growing steadily.

Wood

Wood is a versatile and attractive decking material. According to the wood resource Real Cedar, some people think that wood is too expensive and requires too much maintenance. In fact, domestic softwoods can be very cost-effective decking options. According to Remodeling Magazine's "Cost vs. Value" report, wood decks retain considerable resale value.

In terms of maintenance, choosing a rot-resistant wood can result in less maintenance. Durable woods include cedar and redwood. Popular Mechanics says both species contain tannins and oils that make them naturally resistant to decay, rot and voracious insects. Periodic cleaning and inspection/repairs will be needed, but wood can be much more durable than people may think.

Composite

Composite decking and its close cousin,

plastic lumber, are some of the fastest-growing decking materials on the market. Many products are made from polyethylene or polyvinyl chloride. Some composites will be comprised of recycled plastic and wood fibers to create a weather- and stain-resistant material that doesn't warp, rot or splinter. Composite manufacturers continually experiment with manufacturing processes to duplicate the look of natural wood grain.

Homeowners are often drawn to composite decking because such decks require little maintenance. These decks do not need to be sanded, stained or refinished. However, mold and mildew can grow in shady, damp areas, so homeowners must realize that these products are not completely maintenance-free.

Aluminum

Although aluminum decks are not seen that often, there are reasons why this decking material is becoming more popular. According to LockDry®, manufacturer of aluminum decking materials, power-coated aluminum

(Continued on page 18)

Post-winter garden prep

(Continued from page 16)

discard any debris effectively so it does not find its way back into the garden.

• **Turn the greenhouse into a clean house.** Spring cleaning is not just for the interior of a home. Cleaning a greenhouse in advance of spring can help gardeners evict any overwintering pests that can threaten plant life once spring gardening season arrives. A thorough cleaning, which should include cleaning the inside of greenhouse glass and washing flower pots and plant trays, also can prevent plant diseases from surviving into spring.

• **Check for pests.** Speak with a local gardening professional to determine if there are any local pests to look out for and how to recognize and remove these pests from gardens. Pests may hibernate in the soil over

the winter, and such unwelcome visitors can make it difficult for gardens to thrive come spring and summer.

If plants, flowers or gardens have struggled in recent years or never grew especially vibrant, then gardeners may want to assess the location of their plant life before spring gardening season begins. Some plants may not be getting enough sunlight in certain locations on a property, while others might be overexposed to the sun during spring and summer. Moving plants that are not thriving prior to the start of spring gardening season may be just what gardens need to flourish in the coming weeks.

Spring gardening season is right around the corner, so now is an ideal time to prepare gardens for the warmer seasons ahead.

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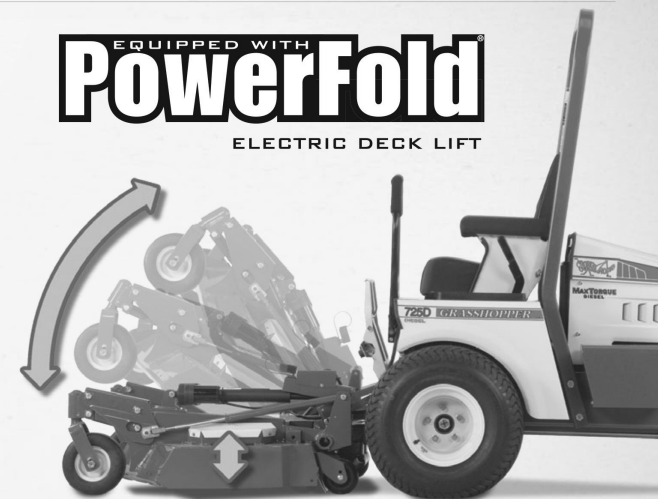
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