

Choosing the right decking material

Billed as low-maintenance and attractive solutions for the yard, vinyl or composite decks have become the materials of choice for more homeowners in recent years. They're supposed to last longer and require less maintenance than wood counterparts — perfect for homeowners who would rather enjoy their outdoor spaces, rather than spend hours each season maintaining them.

But how do composite materials really stack up against wood? Before you choose your decking material, consider the pros and cons of any available options.

Resistance

No decking product is completely indestructible. Both composite and wood decks can warp, fade or be scratched and dinged.

Wood decks may have the advantage over composite materials in this

arena simply because of their ability to be refinished. Therefore, if an area is damaged or faded it can be repaired. The same options are not available with composite materials.

Durability

Composite decks, those made of vinyl, plastic, polypropylene, polyethylene, or a combination of plastic and wood pulp would seem to be more durable than wood decks.

It's true that composite products resist weather-related damage better. However, a relatively high rate of expansion and contraction can cause composite decks to warp and hardware to loosen. Composite decks also are not as easy to repair as wood decks — they must be replaced. Therefore their longevity could be compromised by this fact.

Maintenance

Composite decks will require considerably less seasonal maintenance than wood decks. Manufacturers recommend certain cleaning and tightening of joint spacing to avoid sagging. However, certain building codes require composite decks be built upon wood structural supports, so a composite deck could have some wood material after all.

Wood decks require routine staining, cleaning, sanding, etc. This can be time-consuming, which is why many homeowners seek options in composite decking.

'Green' factor

There are supporters and detractors to both



Wood or composite? The choice of decking material is really up to the homeowner and how much maintenance he or she can handle.

wood and composite decks in terms of environmental impact. Wood decks seemingly are harmful to the environment because of the harvesting of wood and depletion of forests, but forests can be replanted. Composite decks are made from plastics, which do not decompose easily when disposed of.

Both wood and composite decks require many chemicals for cleaning and other maintenance, which can seep into the ground and leach into water supplies.

Heat factor

Homeowners placing a

deck around a swimming pool or in a sunny location may be concerned with how hot the building material will be underfoot.

Wood tends to reflect the sunlight more readily than composite materials, particularly if the wood is light in color. Therefore it could be more comfortable to walk upon.

Appearance

Many composite materials come close to looking like wood, but they may still appear plastic. It's hard to improve upon the timeless and cozy appearance of wood environmental landscaping items.

Report projects new housing starts will increase in 2010

Although Canada's new housing starts declined steeply in 2009, a report from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation predicts that builders will start building again next year. While economic recovery is still uncertain, and expected to be slow, low interest rates and low prices are expected to contribute to improving demand in Canada's market.

The market is moderating due to three key factors, says the report from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

First, strong house price growth between 2002 and 2007 has tempered home ownership demand particularly in Western Canada. Second, the record

high levels of new listings have increased the competition from the existing home market and reduced spillover demand. And, finally, uncertainty about the economic outlook is a contributing factor restraining demand for home ownership.

Overall in 2009, property starts declined in all areas of Canada. By 2010, however, all provinces will see increases in property starts, the report states.

The report also warns that if the US recession proves to be deeper and more prolonged than is currently expected, then job losses in Canada could be greater than forecast. In turn, this could cause the demand for home ownership to fall.

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