

DeckStainHelp.com

Recommendations from the Experts at Deck Stain Help.

Comparing Deck Stain Types: Sealers vs Stains vs Coatings

Finding the right stain for your wooden deck is the key to getting lasting results. But with so many deck stain choices it can be a daunting task to say the least. To narrow down the search for the best deck stain you first need to understand what the different types of protection are.

Adding to the confusion, the deck protectors are often marketed as a deck stain, deck sealer, or deck paint (a.k.a. solid stain). Regrettably, many untrained contractors, and especially painters and power-washers use the terms loosely when speaking about deck coatings in general. But some clarification can definitely help.

Deck Sealers

A sealer usually does not alter the appearance of the surface. It is applied to protect the surface from such things like foot traffic, water damage, mold, and mildew. Therefore, deck sealers are most commonly any clear, transparent, or translucent coating that protects the wood without altering the appearance.

Deck sealers are popular for those wanting the most natural wood look you can get while still providing water protection. Most deck sealers have excellent water repellency properties but lack in shielding against harmful UV rays causing the wood to turn gray over time.

Deck Stains

A deck stain is similar to a sealer in the sense that it provides weather protection but it does alter the appearance of the wood. Deck stains are simply deck sealers that are tinted or toned. These stains are usually the semi-transparent and semi-solid deck stains. They come in a wide variety of tints but most commonly are available in natural tones, browns, and reds. A tinted deck stain allows the wood grain to show through and can really enhance the wood's beauty. Because of the added pigment, deck stains do provide some UV protection unlike clear deck sealers.

With penetrating deck stains longevity is normally better and future maintenance is much easier and less expensive. Penetrating wood stains don't sit on top of the wood surface like film forming stains but rather penetrates or dives into the wood pours to give superb protection. Penetrating deck stains are excellent water repellants and do a good job of blocking harmful sun rays. They are usually transparent or semi-transparent allowing the natural beauty of the wood to show through and are available in different colors or tones.

As a penetrating wood deck stain ages and begins to wear it does not peel or flake but instead it just fades and begins to disappear. They are also normally much easier to remove using a deck stain stripper so a recoat can be applied. In the case of using the same penetrating stain for a

recoat, you can even do a light wash to the wood without removing the old stain before applying a new coat of the same penetrating stain. This recoat over an old coat of stain is much more effective with penetrating stains than with the film forming type.

Deck Paints / Coatings / Acrylics

Often Sold by Paint, Hardware, and BIG Box Stores As A Stain.

Deck paint or coatings usually refers to a heavily pigmented *solid colored deck stain*. These are also known as solid stains, acrylic stains, film forming, deck recoating systems (“**Deck RESTORE**”, **Olympic RESCUE IT!**, **Sherwin-Williams DeckScapes**, **Behr “DeckOver”**, etc.) -- but be assured, there is NO such thing as a “solid stain”. A solid stain cannot penetrate the wood, stain wood, and be a solid at the same time. Like paint, they completely mask or hide the surface. Solid stains or deck paints are film forming and do not penetrate the wood. They form a film on the surface and are a 100% representation of their color as no wood shows through at all. Deck paints provide the most UV protection but are also prone to cracking and peeling especially on horizontal surfaces as they can actually hold the moisture in the wood.

The main differences between penetrating stains and deck coatings or paints are appearance, longevity, and maintenance. The way a solid stain or film forming deck paint or stain works is basically like the name suggests, it forms a film or barrier of protection that stays on top of the wood surface. Film forming stains are normally semi-solid to solid stains that come in a wide array of colors. They mostly hide the wood grain and show a lot more color almost like a paint. The downside with film forming stains is the way they wear over time. As the wood stain begins to age and break down it literally begins to crack, flake, or peel off of the wood, sometimes in sheets.

Film forming or solid wood stains are typically more heavily pigmented than penetrating stains making them much tougher to get rid of once a recoat is necessary. Not being able to remove an old coat means applying a new coat over top. Although the wood surface may look better initially following a recoat of this manner, it doesn’t tend to last as long because this type of deck stain doesn’t adhere well to itself. Over time, the buildup of multiple coats begins to create more frequent peeling and flaking, mold and mildew issues, *and a nearly irreversible mess*.

When choosing a deck stain type it isn’t hard to see a clear winner. As far as a more natural enhanced wood appearance, longevity, and ease of future maintenance – penetrating deck stains are best.

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