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FALL OUTDOOR LIVING ISSUE: DECKING • RAILING • LIGHTING • TOOLS

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# SELECT DECKING

HELP CUSTOMERS CHOOSE  
THE RIGHT DECKING MATERIAL

— BY DAVE KILE

**IN DECKING**, the choice of material plays a pivotal role in determining how well a deck withstands the elements and time. In this article, we'll explore the key factors to consider when choosing decking materials for longevity and performance.

## Decking Material: A Crucial Decision

One of the foremost considerations when selecting decking materials is durability. Different materials have

varying levels of resistance to weather, pests and wear-and-tear.

- **Pressure-treated wood:** A classic and cost-effective choice, pressure-treated wood is infused with chemicals that enhance its resistance to decay and insects. However, regular maintenance, including sealing and staining, is necessary to prevent moisture infiltration, warping, splitting and discoloration.

- **Composite:** Composites are a blend of wood fibers and recycled plastic, offering a low-maintenance alternative to wood. They are highly resistant to moisture, insects and rot, leading to a longer lifespan compared to traditional wood. They also resist fading, staining and scratching, making them an excellent choice for longevity. Ensure that you select high-quality composites with UV protection to prevent color fading over time.

- **Cedar and redwood:** These natural woods contain oils and tannins that make them resistant to rot and insects. While they offer a rich aesthetic, they do require regular staining and sealing to maintain their durability, preserve their color and prevent weathering.

- **Tropical hardwood:** Hardwoods like ipé, cumaru and tigerwood are known for their extreme durability and resistance to decay, insects and even fire. They age beautifully but require regular maintenance to retain their appearance. They also come with a higher cost that may deter some clients.

## Joist & Ledger Protection: Small Investment, Significant Returns

If built with wood, a deck's substructure is highly susceptible to moisture infiltration and rot, which can compromise the integrity of the entire deck. Joist protection tape serves as a barrier between the joists and the decking material, preventing water and debris from causing damage. This simple yet effective solution can significantly extend the lifespan of a deck by preventing moisture-related issues. Here's why it's worth considering:

- **Moisture protection:** Joist protection tape prevents moisture from seeping onto joists, beams and other vulnerable areas of a deck's substructure. Butyl-based tapes, like Trex Protect, provide added moisture protection by creating a tight seal around fasteners to prevent water from infiltrating screw holes.



**LBM DEALERS'** expertise, just like professional deck builders' should extend beyond mere construction to selecting materials that guarantee longevity and customer satisfaction. (All photos by Trex)

- **Rot prevention:** Moisture accumulation is a major cause of joist rot, which can compromise the structural integrity of the deck. The tape acts as a shield against rot-causing agents.

- **Enhanced stability:** The chemicals used in pressure-treated lumber can accelerate metal corrosion. Joist protection tape prevents direct contact between the metal fasteners and the chemicals, extending their lifespan.

When selecting joist protection tape, opt for a high-quality, self-adhesive butyl tape that adheres well to both wood and composite materials. Look for tape that provides a secure seal to prevent water intrusion, has excellent UV resistance to withstand exposure to sunlight, and comes with a solid warranty of at least 25 years.

And don't forget the ledger board. This key connection point where the deck attaches to a house is especially vulnerable to moisture, but it can be fully sealed with wider flashing tapes. Recently introduced as a superior alternative to traditional flashing options, these tapes combine the structural support of metal flashing with the tight seal of butyl tape.

## Deck Drainage: A Must-Have for Elevated Decks

Proper deck drainage is an often underestimated aspect of deck longevity, particularly when the deck and foundation are built with wood. Poor drainage can lead to water pooling, rot and structural damage. Using a network of troughs and downspouts, an under-deck drainage system captures and diverts water away from the deck's surface and framing, ensuring that the substructure remains dry and protected. The main benefits of adding this type of system include:

- **Preventing water accumulation:** Water pooling on the deck's surface or around the foundation can lead to wood rot, mold growth and deterioration of the supporting structure.

- **Protecting the substructure:** Water that seeps through decking boards can compromise the integrity of the joists and beams, leading to weakening of the entire structure. A deck drainage system prevents this by channeling water away from vulnerable areas.

By preventing moisture-related issues, a drainage system significantly extends the lifespan of your deck.



**ENGINEERED** with an aluminum liner, wider deck flashing tapes such as Trex Seal are available in widths from 11" to 22" to cover the entire surface of the ledger board—both on top and beneath—creating a seamless seal between the ledger, substructure and housewrap for optimal protection from water penetration.

- **Usable space:** Deck drainage systems are particularly beneficial for elevated decks because they allow the area beneath the deck to be utilized for storage or as additional outdoor living space.

While there are numerous options for under-deck drainage systems with various configurations, components and price points, these systems largely fall into one of two categories: those that are installed beneath the substructure framing, and those that are applied above the joists. For optimal protection and aesthetics, many contractors prefer drainage systems that install above the joists between the substructure and the deck boards. This application protects the entire substructure from moisture penetration and allows for gas and electrical lines to be run safely and discreetly between the deck surface and a soffit ceiling below to power lighting, ceiling fans, barbecues, appliances and electrical components, allowing contractors to create a space with the look and function of an outdoor room.

## Environmental Impact: Longevity through Sustainability

In today's environmentally conscious world, homeowners are increasingly looking for sustainable decking

options. Consider offering eco-friendly materials that align with these values.

- **Composite decking:** Many composite decking options incorporate recycled materials, such as plastic bags and wood scraps that would otherwise be destined for landfill, making them both a durable and environmentally friendly choice.

- **Certified sustainable wood:** If natural wood is preferred, opt for wood that is certified by organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), indicating responsible and sustainable sourcing.

A well-constructed deck is more than just an outdoor space—it's an investment that brings years of enjoyment and satisfaction. Choosing the right decking materials for longevity involves careful consideration of material durability, maintenance requirements, exposure and vulnerability to moisture, and environmental impact. The right selections combined with expert installation will ensure a beautiful and long-lasting deck that stands the test of time. **BP**

— Dave Kile is the founder and owner of IBP, LLC, which manufactures and markets Trex RainEscape, Trex Protect and Trex Seal through a licensing agreement with Trex Co. ([www.trex.com](http://www.trex.com)).