

On deck for Summer Fun



Mark Cooper



reminds builders of B.C. Building Code requirements that guard rails have to be at least three feet high if the deck is more than two feet off the ground, and 42 inches if it's more than six feet in elevation. (Think about going even higher, if you have a nice view you want to enjoy while sitting down...)

Guards (like pickets) can't have spaces more than four inches apart, but you may want to opt for glass here – it's a great way to keep your view, and it really helps reduce noise from traffic or neighbours.

Plan ahead if you think you might want to put a hot tub on your deck some day. The extra footing and framing won't add much cost now, but it will be hard to find a carpenter to do the small, finicky work to retrofit the additional supports at a later date.

Also, pay attention to what you might want to put underneath the deck. A small change in design may allow you to cover the space – for dry storage or even living space. The building code will require a vinyl or torched membrane on top, but you can put nice decking (boards) material over that.

It may be hard to believe -- during a cold, rainy winter -- but a new deck or porch can add a whole extra room for summer fun that you can actually enjoy most of the year.

Yes, it's time to start thinking about getting ready for a new area where you can barbecue, sunbathe or just be fanned by cool breezes to beat the heat. And here are some things you'll want to consider if you're planning on revamping your current deck or creating a new one.

There are few materials that look better than natural cedar. But there are options for those who don't want the maintenance – cedar decking has to be power washed and re-stained every year or two. And it has a limited lifespan.

A less visually appealing option is pressure-treated wood. Recent changes require ACQ chemicals that are supposed to be safer than the heavy metals that used to be allowed. You get lower maintenance and a longer life, but don't plan on painting a new pressure-treated deck you build this summer. That's because most treated wood comes from logs transported in water, and it's usually stored outside exposed to the elements. So you'll have to wait to paint it, and you may also notice some shrinkage and checking.

There are also man-made deck materials -- composites of plastic and wood fibres like Trex or Crosstimber. These won't look like wood, but there's almost no maintenance and they last virtually forever. There are still some concerns about these boards shrinking, and if

you go this route, make sure all your boards are from the same dye lot or you may notice colour differences.

If you want something natural, long-lasting and low maintenance, you can spring for massaranduba, a South American exotic hardwood. It's gorgeous, like having a hardwood floor outdoors. But where treated wood is about \$2.25 a square foot and cedar about \$3.40, massaranduba is close to \$7.25. (Trex and Crosstimber aren't cheap either, at close to \$7 a square foot.)

For the reader who asked about natural decking that will stand up to a dog's scratching and traffic, massaranduba is the answer.

A nice compromise can be to use good-looking cedar for vertical parts of the deck, where rain doesn't have a chance to penetrate, and choosing something more durable for decking boards and stairs.

If you want a smaller deck, you might not need to get a building permit. In North Van District, for example, detached decks less than 108 square feet and no more than three feet off the ground are exempt. But if you want something bigger or higher, or attached to the house, you will need a permit. Not only that, but large elevated decks the extra space has to be included in the amount of living area you're allowed for your lot size, and it will also count when the assessor is looking at the taxable value of your home.

A recent bulletin from the District planning office also



Finally, take advantage of existing overhang or consider extending at least part of the roof so you can still barbecue on rainy days or stay out of the sun when it's blazing. And think about installing infrared heating to extend your outdoor season when evenings start to get cool again.

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