

HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

Let It Snow! Just Be Sure To Prep The Deck First

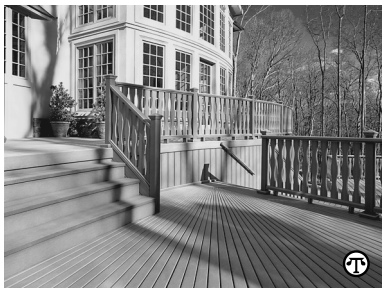
(NAPSA)—The nearly 40 million Americans who own decks probably won't be lounging on them during the cold winter months ahead. However, it's important not to neglect your deck as the weather turns chillier. Take advantage of the temperate fall weekends to clean and prep your deck for the snow, sleet and ice to come.

Here are five quick tips to make sure your outdoor living space remains beautiful and welcoming for next year.

Tip #1: Scuffs and abrasions accumulated during the summer from furniture or foot traffic can mar the beauty of a deck's surface. Consequently, half of all Americans are not satisfied with the appearance of their decks. Before the first snow falls, it's important to wash, stain and seal wood decks—a process that can take several days and may require the use of heavy equipment like a power washer. With a wood-alternative deck, scuffs and abrasions should naturally fade or disappear during the weathering process.

Tip #2: BBQ sauce is delicious, but not when the leftovers from a summer cookout are coating your deck. In fact, oil and grease stains can be downright unappetizing—especially if they're set in. Whether you have a wood or a wood-alternative deck, try scrubbing stains with a household degreasing agent. For set-in stains, try an automotive degreaser or a carburetor cleaner and rinse immediately with hot water.

Tip #3: Mold and mildew are enemies of any exterior surface—



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especially shady decks exposed to pollen or other organic debris and standing puddles of water. Never let snow or ice accumulate on your deck for lengthy periods of time. Sweeping the surface creates a first line of defense against mold and mildew and prevents the creation of an environment that nurtures the growth of fungus. For stubborn piles of snow or ice, use calcium chloride or rock salt, available in many home centers, to speed melting. Be sure to rinse off when first practical. In addition, wood decks should be sealed every other year to protect against other moisture problems such as rotting planks—a problem that 44 percent of Americans feel makes their decks unsafe for kids and pets.

Tip #4: Extreme changes in weather can speed up splintering of deck boards. To ensure that

next year's outdoor fun is ouch-free, fix splintering boards on a wood deck before winter's arrival. The amount of time and effort required to make repairs will depend on the extent of the damage. Lightly splintered boards may be salvaged through sanding, while severely splintered planks will continue to deteriorate and most likely will need to be replaced. For a splinter-free deck, choose a highly durable wood-alternative material that offers the natural beauty of wood but leaves behind the rotting and splintering.

Tip #5: Loose nails that are exposed above the deck's surface create hazards, especially for children and pets. In fact, nearly 10 percent of Americans believe that their decks are unsafe because of exposed nails. A summer of fun and play on a wood deck may mean that some nail heads have begun to protrude. Inspect the boards and hammer down or replace any noticeable heads with galvanized screws that are approximately ½ inch longer than the original nails. For a smooth deck surface that is completely free of any type of nails or fasteners, consider wood-alternative material such as Trex Brasilia with its proprietary Hideaway Hidden Fastening System, suggests Scott Fedor, senior product manager of decking at Trex, the country's largest manufacturer of wood-alternative decking, railing and fencing products.

For more information on how to clean and care for wood-alternative decks, visit www.trex.com.