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Buying advice *Deck treatments*

Deck treatments that retain their appearance the longest are the ones that are the most like paint. Widely advertised clear finishes don't provide long-term protection.

Lumber, like skin, doesn't fare well when it's left unprotected. The sun's ultraviolet rays are always on the attack. Rain and sun alternately swell and dry wood, eventually causing it to crack and split. Moisture promotes the growth of mold and mildew. Even redwood, cedar, and pressure-treated wood can benefit from a protective coat. Our tests show that many clear deck treatments usually don't offer more than a year of protection before their appearance has visibly degraded.

WHAT'S AVAILABLE

Major brands include Ace, Behr, Benjamin Moore, Cabot, Flood, Glidden, Olympic, Sherwin-Williams, Sikkens, Thompson's, and Wolman. There are also many smaller, specialized brands

Opaque: These finishes hide the wood grain like a coat of paint and last longest. They are best for the typical deck made of pressure-treated pine, where grain isn't important. Opaque finishes, usually solid-color stains, hold up for at least three years. On the downside, some decks look better if the natural wood is exposed. Opaque finishes can also build up a film, especially after several coats. That film can peel, chip, and crack like a paint film. These finishes generally require more extensive and time-consuming preparation for refinishing, compared with semi-transparent or clear treatments.

Semitransparent: These finishes usually contain a small amount of pigment but let the wood grain show. This type is best for a deck made of expensive wood that you want to show off, such as cedar or redwood. This category includes a broad range of pigmented products, from little pigment to almost opaque, and all products that change the color of the wood after treatment. A semitransparent finish may need to be reapplied every two to three years.

Clear: These treatments contain water repellents but no pigment. They may also have UV inhibitors and wood preservatives to help protect the wood. They're ideal for people who value the natural look of wood over the treatment's longevity, especially for decks built of exotic or premium wood species. Our years of testing have shown that most clear deck finishes don't last more than one year, deck refinishing an annual chore.

Price range: \$15 to just over \$40 per gallon.

HOW TO CHOOSE

Our extensive testing shows a wide range of results. As a rule, however, the best opaques still last longer than the best semitransparent and clear finishes. Our CR Quick Picks include high-scoring examples of all three types. Here's what else to consider before you carry those cans to the checkout desk:

Look beyond the brand. Even same-brand deck treatments often perform differently. What's more, a brand that worked well for you last time might not this time around, because manufacturers change products frequently to address cost and performance issues and to comply with government regulations such as those for volatile organic compounds, which react to create ground-level ozone. We removed from our Ratings tested coatings that have been reformulated and are no longer sold.

Factor in your cleanup. Latex-based deck treatments are water-soluble and allow easier cleanup than most oil-based, or alkyd, coatings. But some alkyd blends also clean up with water.

Save money down the road. Except for the high-scoring Olympic clear, priced at just \$13 per gallon, the best treatments tend to cost the most. But their longer life should save you money over time.

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Ratings *Exterior stains*



Cabot

Wolman

Availability Most products at stores through December 2007.

* indicate Quick Picks.

Within types, in performance order.

● Excellent
 ◐ Very good
 ◑ Good
 ◒ Fair
 ◓ Poor

Quick picks	Product	Price	Finish	Type	Overall score	Appearance			Resists			
						After 1 yr.	After 2 yr.	After 3 yr.	Dirt	Color change	Mildew	Cracking
FULLY TESTED: 3-YEAR RESULTS												
*	Cabot Decking Stain 1480	\$29	opaque	alkyd	81.	●	●	◐	●	●	●	
*	Cabot Solid Color 1880	30	opaque	latex	67.	●	◐	◐	●	●	●	●
*	Wolman DuraStain 18146 ◻	23	semi	alkyd	61.	◐	◐	◑	●			●
	Benjamin Moore Acrylic SolidDeck Stain 065	33	opaque	latex	58.	◐	◐	◑		●	●	●
	Akzo Nobel Sikkens Cetol SRD 1708902	27	semi	alkyd	53.	●	◐	◒				
	McCloskey Storm CoatDeck & Siding 7953	16	opaque	latex	52.	◐	◑	◑		●		●
*	Olympic WaterGuard 55560	13	clear	latex	51.	◑	◑	◑				
	True Value Woodsman UV 7338872	20	semi	alkyd	45.	●	◑	◒				
	Pratt & Lambert Stainshield Oil S1697	24	semi	alkyd	41.	◑	◑	◒			●	
	Wolman RainCoat Tinted Water Repellent 12346	18	semi	latex	41.	◑	◑	◒			●	
	Olympic Solid Color Deck Stain 53060	22	opaque	latex	38.	◑	◑	◒				●
	Sherwin-Williams Decksapes Solvent Based A18C 50602	33	semi	alkyd	27.	◐	◒			●		●
	Sherwin-Williams Decksapes Water Based A15 T15	32	semi	latex	25.	◑	◒					●
	Olympic Semi-Transparent Deck Stain 53106	21	semi	alkyd	25.	◑	◒			●		●
	Olympic Wood Protector 79253 (Lowe?s)	19	semi	alkyd	24.	◑	◒				●	
	Amteco TWP 101	25	semi	alkyd	19.	◑	◒					●
	McCloskey Storm Coat Waterproofing Wood Protector 7921	15	semi	alkyd	19.	◑	◒					●

