

TROPICAL

Technical Bulletin: Black Spots, Mold and Mildew on Wood Decking

From time to time, we get calls asking about black spots that appear on wood decking. This discoloration can occur on nearly all wood species.

These spots are caused by either, mold and mildew or by reaction between the natural tannins contained in wood with iron particles.

MOLD or MILDEW It is important to note that mold typically results from the build up of organic matter on the deck surface combined with consistent moisture and heat exposure. Mold and Mildew can impact virtually all construction materials including Plastics, Composites, PVC, metals and Glass.

Mold spots can typically be cleaned with a 50/50 bleach and water solution. Premixed “deck cleaners” containing chlorine bleach can be used.

Sodium per carbonate based deck cleaners are also used to clean dirty decks and may also remove mildew.



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IRON SPOTS are often seen as black rings around fasteners. Small black dots on the deck may also be caused by filings from iron railings, shingle granules, fertilizers, or any particle containing iron that remains on the deck. This type of black staining on the deck can be removed with oxalic acid-based cleaners/wood brighteners. These cleaners are sold in paint departments as “wood brighteners” and contain the active ingredient, oxalic acid. Generally, they are supplied in a powder or a concentrated solution form and are mixed with water. Multiple applications may be necessary to remove the stain. To prevent the problem from returning, the fastener will have to be removed and replaced with a higher-grade stainless steel fastener. If you are sealing to maintain the color of your deck consider using cleaners from the same manufacturer as the sealer.



It is important to note that once wood brighteners are used the deck must be resealed immediately as wood brighteners can activate the natural sugars in wood which contribute to mold growth.

Make sure you rinse your deck thoroughly after the application of deck cleaners or wood brighteners.

Use extreme caution when handling any of these chemicals and wear protective clothing and glasses. Do not mix these cleaners with ammonia or household cleaners. We recommend that tests in small areas on a few different boards be made before overall use on the project. Always consult and follow the manufacturer’s recommendations when using proprietary products.