



Top Decking Mistakes

Common mistakes homeowners make when updating, repairing, or building a new deck.

A basic deck update or repair might seem simple at first glance, but when things go wrong, problems escalate quickly. Even a new deck project that seems straightforward can go south quickly if you don't know what you are getting into.



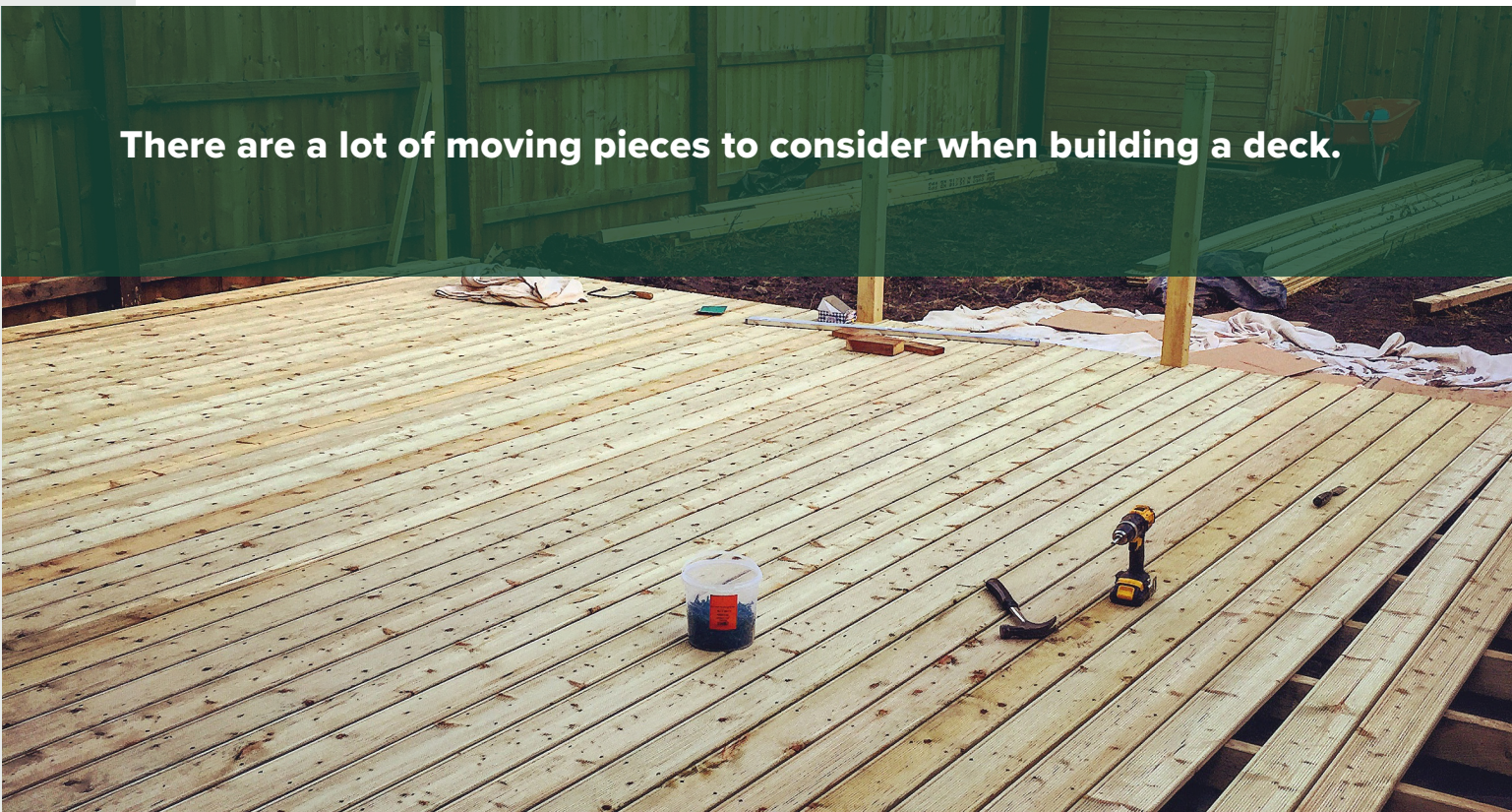
Here are the top mistakes we see homeowners and ambitious DIYers make when tackling a decking project.

#1: Ignoring the understructure

It can be all too easy to take one look at an aging backyard deck and think it's as simple as replacing a few boards. The natural reaction is to focus on the superficial planking (because that's what's easy to see), without paying enough attention to the health of the deck structure itself.

However, unless your deck was installed within the last five years, it's smart to check out what's happening "below deck". That means physically getting under the deck to visually inspect support beams for rot and looking for red rust residue or other telltale signs of corrosion around connectors and deck fasteners.

There are a lot of moving pieces to consider when building a deck.



#2: Not staying up to code

Building codes and safety codes for decking are updated regularly, so decks that were installed 20+ years ago often aren't up to code. For example, today's residential building code states that supports must be spaced 16 on center. Decks installed before this standard were built on supports spaced 24 inches apart.

If your supports are spaced too far apart or your surface boards are installed on a diagonal, be careful not to over span your material during updates.

#3: Underestimating time required

Repairing or updating your deck should never be a rush job. Bringing an old deck up to snuff the right way takes time. You'll need to thoroughly inspect the deck, identify the problems, obtain all your materials and perform repairs. Give yourself a schedule with plenty of time to do the job right and correct mistakes or unforeseen situations.



#4: Improperly attaching the ledger board

The ledger is the critical component that connects non-freestanding decks to a structure. Usually made of pressure treated lumber, the ledger provides much of the deck's strength by creating the frame's stiffness and supporting the joists.

Proper deck installation requires attaching the ledger to the studs of the main structure, not attaching it to superficial materials like brick or stucco. Correct installation of the ledger is the trickiest part of building a deck. Special hardware is required since this area is prone to moisture collection that can cause rot and undermine the integrity of the deck.

Building codes have specific rules about how to install the ledger. Read requirements closely before getting to work.

Improper installation could lead to serious problems such as the deck detaching itself from the structure or collapsing.



#5: Using the wrong hardware

Not all hardware is created equal. Make sure that your deck fasteners are specifically designed for outdoor use. Indoor hardware for homes—the stuff you typically find at big-box hardware stores—is not designed to stand up to the elements the way outdoor-specific hardware is. Look for steel hardware designed for use with pressure-treated lumber.

#6: Not getting to know your wood

Certain woods perform better and last longer under the heat, cold and moisture demands of the outdoors. Cedar or redwood decking materials perform well outside and do not require treatment. Douglas fir, on the other hand, is not ideal for outdoor use, so it should be stained or sealed for protection. Staining does help redwood and cedar, but it's not totally necessary.

#7: Not seeking professional guidance

Unless you have extensive experience in designing and constructing decks, you might not be aware of all the technical challenges you'll face when installing or upgrading your deck. You must be comfortable handling math and engineering challenges that can get complicated quickly.



You should hire a professional decking contractor if:

- **You need your deck quickly**

How important it is for your deck to be completed in a timely manner? If you want to get your deck done quickly so you can begin enjoying it right away, hiring a contractor is your best bet. If you want to do it yourself and the only available time in your schedule is Saturday afternoons, you can look forward to a full-summer deck installation project. If you're okay with that, great. If not, call in a professional.

- **You're facing engineering challenges**

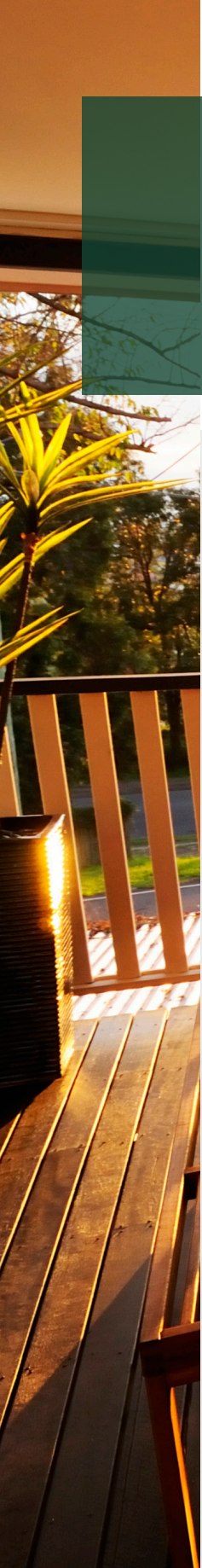
Weight-bearing decks—those that need to support heavy structures like a jacuzzi—have unique engineering challenges that, for safety reasons, can't be solved by best guesses. Weight-bearing decks need to be sturdier, which means bigger, stronger, beams and posts. In earthquake-prone areas, specific earthquake-resistant hardware is advised and important design features ensure the best lateral support to keep the deck from pulling away from the house during an earthquake.

- **You want a creative solution**

You don't know what you don't know. You might have basic ideas for your deck, but a contractor will convert "basic" into "stunning." High-end decks are true works of artistic craftsmanship. Contractors can work with the materials of your choice, from natural wood to Resysta decking, to create a visual centerpiece that can dramatically alter the look of your outdoor space.

- **You're not familiar with all materials and products**

If you're not fully up to date with what's out there, you could be overlooking the best solution for your project. In fact, working with the materials themselves can even present a challenge. Whether you select redwood decking or a natural fiber compound, a professional will have the right tools and know-how to manage the materials and provide you with the ideal solution.



Don't make these decking mistakes. Talk to the decking experts at J&W Lumber before you start working on your deck.

We have decking experts at all of our J&W Lumber locations. Stop in to one of our showrooms today.

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