

Best Composite Decking of 2024

To determine which composite decking holds up, we evaluated planks from brands like Azek, Fiberon, TimberTech, Trex, and more

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Composite decking, like the TimberTech AZEK above, requires less maintenance than traditional wood decking. Photo: Azek

Composite decking has a lot to offer that traditional wood can't.

It's easier to maintain, for one thing. Composite decking—an amalgam of ground-up wood and plastic formed into planks—doesn't ever need to be sealed, stained, or painted. Real wood may need to be restained as frequently as every two years and resealed as frequently as once a year.

What's more, the price difference between composite and wood decking has shrunk of late. Although they've since abated, pandemic-related lumber shortages raised the price of pressure-treated yellow pine, the most common and least costly decking wood. Composite wood used to be much more expensive than real wood, too, but now that price gap is smaller. Today, that price will depend on where you live, the decking you buy, and other factors.

We compared the two options at a Lowe's near our headquarters in Yonkers, N.Y. A single 16-foot pine decking board was selling for nearly \$26, only \$6 less than you'd pay for a board of Trex Enhance. Upgraded composite options will still cost considerably more than real wood.

Composite decking has other advantages. For instance, some planks are flexible enough to be heated and shaped, allowing you to create, say, rounded corners, railings, or a border for a kidney-shaped pool. That would be expensive to duplicate in solid wood decking.

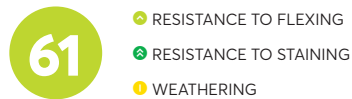
Aesthetics are a factor, too, especially if you like a uniform look. The woodlike grain lacks irregularities like knots that can show up in the real thing.

That doesn't mean composite decking looks boring, says Rich Handel, the engineer who tests decking for Consumer Reports. "Manufacturers usually use a few different molds to make their composites, so there's some pattern variety," he says.

The manufacturers claim that many of the products we tested are made primarily from recycled materials—recycled plastic grocery bags, for instance. (But based on current recycling technology, that product's destination after a typical life span of 25 years is still likely to be a landfill.)

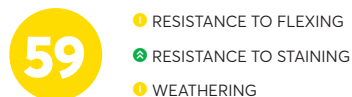
Best Composite Decking

1 Envision Evergrain



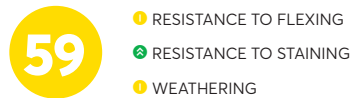
CR's take: Envision Evergrain is our highest-rated composite decking, and for good reason: It's remarkably resistant to slipping and staining. Our tests also found that its resistance to flexing is very good. It comes in three color options: weathered wood, gray, and redwood. While it's not the most resistant to surface damage or weathering, it's still a great product overall. It comes with a 25-year limited stain and product warranty.

2 TimberTech AZEK Harvest Collection



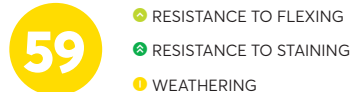
CR's take: Azek Harvest earns a top-notch rating for resistance to staining from spills in our tests. It's also resistant to slipping and surface damage. But it's less adept at resisting flexing, and its score for weathering is also middling. The least pricey of the four Azek composite flooring lines, Azek Harvest comes in three monochromatic colors, meaning each board is a solid color with an opaque or painted-wood look. It's embossed with what the manufacturer calls a "traditional cathedral wood grain pattern." When used in residences, it has a limited lifetime warranty and a 50-year limited stain and fade warranty.

3 Fiberon Horizon



CR's take: Fiberon Horizon's resistance to staining from spills is impressive, and its rating for surface damage is above par. However, the decking's resistance to flexing and slipping, as well as weathering, is midlevel. Horizon is part of the company's Concordia line of composite decking. It has four multi-tonal colors, meaning they're not monochromatic. The company notes that this product has a finished surface on top and bottom, so it can be used for second-story decks and reversed. The product contains 94 percent recycled content, Fiberon claims. When used in residences, it has a limited lifetime warranty and a 50-year limited stain and fade warranty.

4 TimberTech PRO Legacy Collection



CR's take: TimberTech Legacy's resistance to staining from spills is top-level, and its resistance to flexing is very good. Its resistance to slipping and surface damage—and to weathering—rates midrange. There's a choice of six colors, which the maker describes as a "complex, multi-color blending with cascading colors" and "no two boards alike." TimberTech says Legacy contains approximately 85 percent recycled material. In residences, it has a 30-year limited product warranty and a 30-year limited fade and stain warranty.

How Consumer Reports Tests Decking

Ideally, the composite decking you choose will last, look good, and remain safe for years. Consumer Reports' performance tests address these factors.

We use specialized instruments to test each decking sample for resistance to flexing. That ensures that boards won't bow or bend if you're entertaining a crowd or if you park a heavy grill in a particular spot all summer long.

Next, we size up which materials resist staining from spilled ketchup, mustard, and other common items you might use while eating outside. We also evaluate each sample's slip resistance, which is very important if you're installing a deck near a pool.

We drop weights of various sizes on the surface of each board to see which samples dent on impact. And we send more than a dozen samples of each material to two areas with extreme climates: hot and dry Arizona, and Florida, where the humidity presents a different challenge to certain materials.

We assess those samples yearly for three years, evaluating their appearance and retesting for all the attributes above, to see how age and exposure to the elements affect overall performance.

Composite vs. Wood Decking: CR's Test Results

Our tests turned up benefits and drawbacks to using composite decking.

Among the nonwood decking choices, which also included aluminum and plastic, we found composite to be best for the look of wood without the need to apply wood stain. Most composite decking models did a top-notch job of resisting staining from ketchup, mustard, and other common spills.

But some products offered far less resistance to slips, flexing, and sag in our tests. And most choices are more expensive and heavier than traditional natural pine. (We also tested western red cedar, ironwood, and redwood.)

The extra weight of composite planks can make them more difficult to handle if you're doing the job yourself, Handel says.

And even a composite deck that resists staining will need to be cleaned periodically to rid it of everyday dirt and grime. Cleaning guidance varies, especially with regard to pressure washing, so check the maker's website for tips about your specific model.

For a look at all the considerations, start with our decking buying guide.

CR members can jump right to our complete decking ratings or read on for the very best composite decking from our tests. (Note that three composite decking products in CR's tests—Envision Evergrain, Fiberon Paramount, and Veranda Decking Board—are now in their third test year. As you browse the decking ratings, keep in mind that their ratings represent performance after two years, not three.) Unless otherwise noted, the prices below are per linear foot.