

Pressure Treated Lumber FAQ

What preservatives are used for pressure treating and how long are they effective?

For a long time, CCA (Chromated Copper Arsenate) was the primary wood preservative. CCA-treated wood protects against all major forms of destructive attack and is effective for many years. More recently, preservative manufacturers switched to ACQ (Alkaline Copper Quaternary). ACQ is also effective for decades, reducing demands on forest resources. Another common preservative is a solution containing natural, environmentally safe mineral salts called borates. Borate lumber has a powerful barrier against termites — even the extremely destructive Formosan termite. The new generation of pressure-treated wood uses micronized copper as a preservative. This method enables pressure treated lumber to stand up against termite damage and fungal decay.

When is special handling required?

The most important precaution is DO NOT BURN TREATED WOOD. When pressure-treated wood is burned, the preservative chemicals concentrate in the ash and may be inadvertently inhaled. Wear gloves when handling treated lumber, and always wear safety goggles and a dust mask when sawing or cutting treated lumber, just as you would with untreated lumber.

When should I apply wood sealer to pressure-treated lumber decking?

Climate change will affect when and how often wood sealer needs to be applied. To maximize surface protection and to keep your deck looking good, apply a quality wood sealant that contains an ultraviolet stabilizer.

Know when to apply a wood sealer by dripping water onto the deck surface. If the water quickly absorbs into the wood it's time to apply a wood sealer — If the water droplets bead up, your deck is protected. Be sure to test annually.

Do you recommend painting treated wood?

Although treated wood provides a surface that is easier for paints to cover, we do not recommend painting it. Treated wood does not need protection from the elements. But if your decorative decisions call for paint, make sure the wood is dry before application. (Pour some water over the surface. If it beads, wait; if it seeps into the wood, it's ready to paint.)

Can I use pressure-treated landscape timbers as a fence post or deck post?

No. Landscape timbers (unlike 4×4 pressure treated dimensional lumber and 6×6 pressure treated timbers) are not recommended for use as a structural post because they are not treated for ground contact and do not carry a lifetime limited warranty.

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Should I space my pressure-treated wood fence pickets during installation?

Similar to pressure-treated deck boards, some shrinking will occur as the pickets dry. Butting pickets together during installation will minimize the gap left between the pickets when they dry.

Can treated lumber be used indoors?

Yes, treated lumber may be used indoors for any application except cutting boards and countertops.

Why can I use treated lumber for a picnic table but not a countertop?

Picnic tables are primarily used for serving pre-prepared food, while a kitchen countertop is used primarily for preparing food and often as a cutting surface for raw food.

Can treated lumber be used for gardening?

Yes. Treated timbers used to construct raised vegetable gardens and flowerbeds are increasingly popular and practical. Recent scientific tests prove there is no significant uptake of preservatives into plants. And treated wood used for tomato stakes, flowerbed edging, planters, retaining walls, trellises and compost bins have the added advantage of lifetime durability.

Should I space my pressure-treated deck boards during installation?

Ultimately, your deck boards should have an edge gap between $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch to allow for proper ventilation and for debris to pass through.

However, most pressure-treated lumber decking that is sold through lumberyards and box retailers has high moisture content (meaning it's wet) — so the boards are swollen. **Always butt wet boards tight against each other or leave a minimal gap.** Your wet deck boards will contract and create a wider gap as they dry. This could happen in a relatively short period of time (days to weeks) or may take longer depending on your climate and exposure to the sun.

If the wood is dry or has been kiln dried, install deck boards with approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch gap to allow for proper ventilation and for debris to pass through.

Wet or dry, boards should be installed tight end-to-end.

Note: Each piece of lumber is different and the change in width can vary as each board dries.