

## Technical Bulletin: Black Spots on Wood Decking

From time to time we get calls asking about black spots that appear on wood decking. These spots are caused by a reaction with tannins in the wood and can be cleaned from the deck. This discoloration occurs on nearly all woods and is known to happen on Ipe, Garapa, Red Balau, Cedar, Cypress, Redwood and Oak.

These spots are caused by either mold/mildew, by iron particles on the wood or reaction between the wood and fasteners. To test for the cause of the black stain try one of these cleaners to determine which type to use on your deck. If the black stains are removed with bleach then your spots are mold or mildew. If bleach does not remove the black stains your spots are caused by iron.

MOLD or MILDEW black spots can be cleaned with a bleach and water solution. Premixed “deck cleaners” containing chlorine bleach can be used or simply mix 1 part household bleach to 4 parts water and apply to the area. Sodium per carbonate based deck cleaners are used to clean dirty decks and may also remove mildew.



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. 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.

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.