



Why You Should Not Use Bleach to Clean Your Deck and Top-Rated Wood Deck Cleaners 2022

Many homeowners have used household bleach to clean their wood decks but cleaning a deck with household bleach is not an industry recommended best practice for a variety of reasons. This bulletin explains why bleach is not recommended and it provides suggestions for effective alternatives based on recent surveys of the most effective and top-rated wood cleaners.*

The purpose of wood deck cleaners is to remove dirt, mold, algae, and oxidation (graying). Several different brands and formulations of wood deck cleaners are available in the marketplace, and they can be applied using a variety of methods e.g., spray, scrub, or power wash.

Because most deck cleaners raise the pH in wood, it is important after using a cleaner to neutralize the pH. This is most commonly achieved using a deck brightener. This bulletin does not include surveys on deck brighteners but may be included with other products surveyed.

Based on several wood cleaner tests or surveys conducted in 2022 by various companies, we have listed 11 of their top-rated products below.

Important: Why you should not use bleach

- Household bleach (sodium hypochlorite) can potentially break down the *lignin* in wood causing excessive damage to wood cells. The natural pH of wood is slightly acidic, and bleach is a basic solution. As a result, use of bleach on wood shifts the pH from near neutral pH to a basic pH that will damage the cellular structure.¹
- Bleach corrodes metal fasteners, screws, and nails.
- Bleach can cause damage to surrounding plants.
- Bleach, after several months, lightens wood's natural color.
- Bleach does not eliminate the spores from which mold and mildew grow.

Alternatives to Bleach

Hydrogen peroxide is environmentally friendly and a safer substitute than bleach. Its chemical formulation is H₂O₂. As the oxidizing process releases the excess molecule of oxygen, H₂O (water) remains as its residue. For tough jobs, hydrogen peroxide kills the mildew on contact within several minutes.

Oxygen bleach is **sodium percarbonate**, an environmentally friendly and excellent detergent

and bleaching agent with a hydrogen peroxide base. Sodium percarbonate is a cleaning and bleaching agent with a strong fungicide effect. It has been tested and found to be more effective attacking the deeper-rooted organic growth on the porous wood surfaces.

Sodium percarbonate is a white particle powder, nontoxic with no contamination, nonflammable, non-explosive, and soluble in water. It is also biodegradable and leaves no harmful by-products or residues that can harm the environment. Sodium percarbonate is effective in cleaning most average wood preparation jobs.

Apply **oxalic acid** (deck brightener) after using sodium percarbonate or hydrogen peroxide in the cleaning process. The deck brightener will restore the wood to its natural pH and neutralize the sodium percarbonate cleaner. Rinse well. This will provide a beautiful finish when applying the final stain.

Deck brighteners are designed to neutralize and brighten wood without damaging wood fibers.

Our Selection of the Most Highly Rated Wood Cleaners Tested or Surveyed from Nine Sources



- **30 Seconds Spray and Walk Away** – This patio and deck cleaner revives a deck without scrubbing and rinsing. Simply mix with water, apply to the outdoor surface, and let the pH-neutral, phosphate and bleach-free formula work its magic. In two to four weeks, you'll notice the results. Appearance improves the longer it sits on surfaces.
 - Rated "Best Overall Deck Cleaner" by <https://www.familyhandyman.com/list/best-patio-and-deck-cleaners/>.
- **Star-brite Non-Skid Deck Cleaner with PTEF** – A very effective, all-surface cleaner for fiberglass, vinyl, plastic, rubber, metal, and painted surfaces. Special chelating agents lift dirt and spills without the need for heavy scrubbing. Protective polymers provide a barrier against future stains, making clean-up a breeze. Also ideal for cleaning non-textured areas and will not remove wax or polish. Star brite products are proudly made in the United States since 1973.
 - Rated "Best Overall" by <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/best-deck-cleaner/>.
 - Rated #1 by <https://www.bestreviews.guide/deck-cleaners>.
 - Rated "Best for Painted Decks" by <https://www.decks.com/how-to/articles/best-deck-cleaner-options>.
 - Rated #5 by <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner/>.

- Rated "Best with PTEF" by <https://www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/>.
- **Simple Green - Oxy Solve Deck and Fence Pressure Washer Cleaner** – Lifts away tough grime, oils and grease and eliminates stains. Uses the power of peroxide without harsh chemicals. Cleans off tough tree sap, grease and oils from decks and fences. Pressure washer concentrate cleans up to 6,400 sq.ft.
 - Rated #1 "Best for Cleaning Wood Decks" from <https://www.trees.com/best-deck-cleaners>.
 - Rated #3 by <https://www.bestreviews.guide/deck-cleaners>.
 - Rated #7 by <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner/>.
- **Simple Green Oxy Solve Total Outdoor Cleaner, Pressure Washer Concentrate** – Cleans a wide variety of surfaces such as wood, composite, vinyl, metal, fabric, plastic, wicker, concrete, stone, brick, and asphalt. Lifts dirt, grime and stains from mold, mildew, moss, and algae. Uses the power of peroxide to lift grime without harsh chemicals.
 - Rated as "Best Eco-friendly" by <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/best-deck-cleaner/>.
 - Rated as "Best Eco-friendly Deck Cleaner" by <https://ohsospotless.com/deck-cleaners/>.
- **Simple Green 18201 Housing and Siding Cleaner** – Cleans house siding including vinyl, aluminum, stucco, wood, and brick. Removes stains and discoloring from algae, moss, and mildew. Uses the power of peroxide to lift grime without harsh chemicals. Safer, orally non-toxic formula. Pressure washer concentrate cleans up to 6,400 sq. ft.
 - Rated "Best Overall Deck Cleaner" from www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/.
 - Rated "Best Deck Brightener" by <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner-consumer-reports/>.
 - Rated "Best Versatile Deck Cleaner" by <https://ohsospotless.com/deck-cleaners/>
- **Restore-A-Deck Wood Cleaner/Brightener Kit** – Cleaner and brightener in one kit; active ingredient is sodium carbonate peroxyhydrate.
 - Rated "Best Deck Cleaner" from <https://www.decks.com/how-to/articles/best-deck-cleaner-options>.
 - Rated "#1 Deck Cleaner" by <https://www.deckstainhelp.com/best-deck-cleaners/>.
- **Defy Wood Deck Cleaner** – Cleans and opens pores of wood surfaces before staining. This safe, oxygenated bleach deep cleans wood surfaces and opens the pores for maximum stain absorption. This powerful wood deck cleaner not only cleans the wood but will remove weathered graying color caused by UV rays.

- Rated #3 from <https://www.deckstainhelp.com/best-deck-cleaners/>.
 - Rated "Best Cleaner for Hard Surfaces" by <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner/>.
 - Rated "Best for Hard Surfaces" by <https://www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/>.
- **Defy Wood Brightener** – Brightens and neutralizes wood surfaces for better penetration of wood stains.
 - Rated "Best Deck Brightener to Use after a Cleaner" by <https://www.trees.com/best-deck-cleaners>.
 - Rated "Best Pre-staining" by <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/best-deck-cleaner/>.
- **Woodrich Heavy-duty Wood Stripper** – Heavy-duty wood stripper. Formulated to remove existing semi-transparent and solid deck stains and sealers. Effectively removes most exterior wood finishes. Cleans and conditions wood for staining. Removes dirt and grime, along with any existing stain or sealer. Safe for use on all species of wood. Can be used to restore any species of wood as well as any type of wood surface.
 - Rated "Best Deck Cleaner before Staining" by <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner/>.
 - Rated "Best Budget" by <https://www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/>.
 - Rated #4 by <https://www.deckstainhelp.com/best-deck-cleaners/>.
- **Wet & Forget Moss, Mold, Mildew and Algae Cleaner** – Easy spray and leave application. Bio-degradable. No scrubbing, rinsing or pressure washing. Safe for use around landscape and plants, when used as directed. Bleach-free, phosphate-free, and non-acidic. Unlimited shelf life. Safe for virtually any outdoor surface. Eliminates even the toughest cases of moss, algae, lichen, mold, or mildew. Alkyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride 9.9%.
 - Rated "Best Moss and Mold Cleaner" by <https://www.familyhandyman.com/list/best-patio-and-deck-cleaners/> .
 - Rated "Best for Mold and Mildew" and "Best for Roofs and Decks" by www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/
 - Rated "Best for Mold and Mildew" by www.bobvila.com/articles/best-deck-cleaner.com/ .
 - Rated "Best Mold and Algae Stain Remover" by <https://bestconsumerrating.com>.
 - Rated "Best Deck Cleaner for Algae" by <https://ohsospotless.com/deck-cleaners/>.
- **SunJoe House and Deck All Purpose Premium Wash** – Pressure washer concentrate formula. Biodegradable, non-toxic bleach-free. Can be applied with a mop or brush to clean wood, brick and more.

- Rated "Best Pressure Washer Patio and Deck Cleaner" by <https://www.familyhandyman.com/list/best-patio-and-deck-cleaners/>.
- Rated "Best All-purpose" from www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/.
- Rated "Best Deck Cleaning Solution" by <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner/>.
- Rated "Best for Lightly Soiled Wood Decks" by <https://www.decks.com/how-to/articles/best-deck-cleaner-options>.

Top-rated products compiled based on the below 2022 tests/surveys

1. <https://www.trees.com/gardening-and-landscaping/best-deck-cleaners>
2. <https://www.familyhandyman.com/list/best-patio-and-deck-cleaners/>
3. <https://www.homecleaningforyou.com/best-deck-cleaners/>
4. <https://www.deckstainhelp.com/best-deck-cleaners/>
5. <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/best-deck-cleaner/>
6. <https://bestconsumerrating.com/best-deck-cleaner/>
7. <https://www.bestreviews.guide/deck-cleaners>
8. <https://www.decks.com/how-to/articles/best-deck-cleaner-options>
9. <https://ohsospotless.com/deck-cleaners/>

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