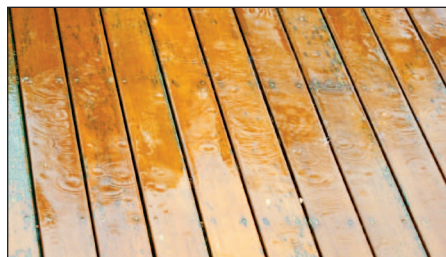


YOUR HOME & GARDEN

HOME SOLUTIONS



COOEE

Florida's rain and sun can take a toll on wood decks. Sealing a deck every two to three years can help prolong its life.

Keep a deck looking new

Q: What's the best way to maintain a deck to keep it looking like new?

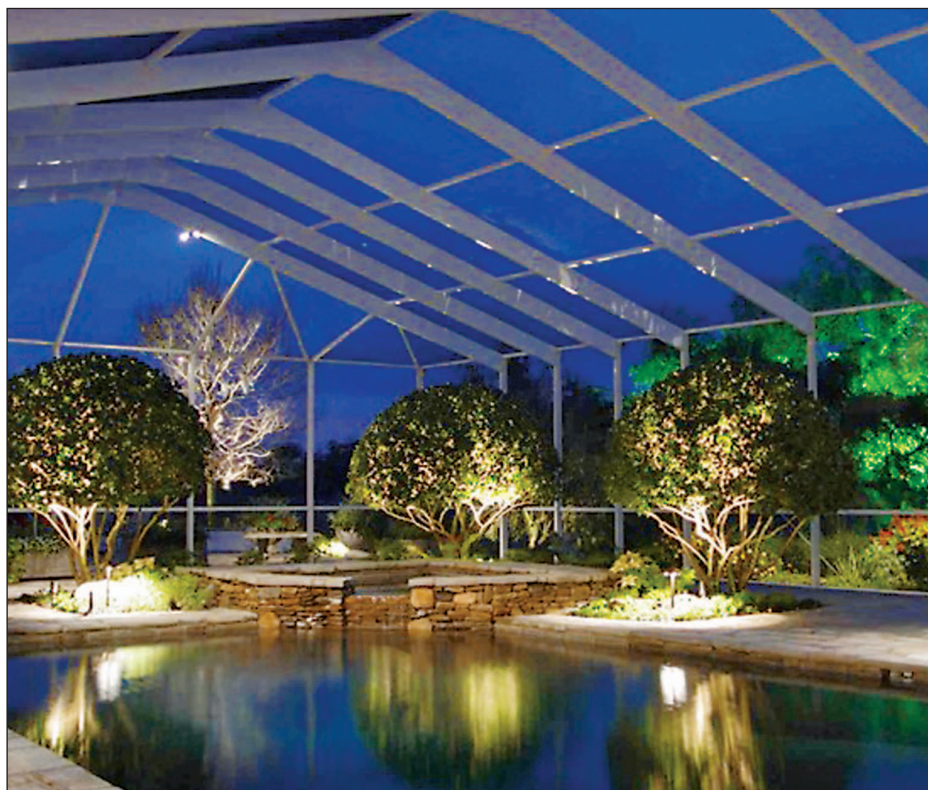
A: All decks require occasional care and maintenance. The amount of service a deck will require depends upon a few factors, such as location, exposure, use, proximity to moisture and organic species (trees, shrubs etc.), and materials used to construct the deck.

The sun, moisture and mold will have the greatest impact on the amount of care and the life span of the decking and handrail caps as these horizontal surfaces will receive much more abuse than the vertical surface, rails, rim joists and support posts. New wood decks will need to have a good quality wood sealer applied from two weeks after to no later than a month after building as the Florida sun cures the pressure treated lumber rapidly. Cleaning and sealing the deck every two to three years, depending upon exposure, will protect it.

Composite decks will need to be sprayed with a good deck cleaner containing trisodium phosphate and bleach on average once a year. Capped composite and solid cellular PVC decking may only need to be hosed off occasionally. Using a cordless blower to remove dirt, leaves and other organic debris once or twice a month will increase the service intervals, reduce the proliferation of mold and keep your deck looking its best.

— Dean Collins,
director of Decks by Collins,
(727) 251-6900

OUTDOOR LIVING



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Trees are uplit to reflect in the pool and downlighting highlights the pathway and strategic plants.

Choosing patio lighting

■ Striking or subtle, the right lighting can enhance your backyard

By ELYSE KELLY

TAMPA.BLOCKSHOPPER.COM

Everyone knows lighting is important inside the home, but sometimes the outside is neglected. Patio lighting can create a perfect ambiance for entertaining or simply relaxing. J.D. Tibbits of Premier Outdoor Lighting offers some advice for homeowners adding lighting to their back patio.

"Two of the main trends in patio lighting are either big and bold, or soft and subdued," he said. "For people who want to make a statement with their patio lighting, there are lots of great options to choose from. One of these options is color-changing LED's. Whether it is color-changing LED tape light under the

perimeter of an outdoor bar, or even color-changing uplights illuminating the landscaping surrounding a patio, utilizing color-changing lighting definitely makes a statement for those you are entertaining."

For those who prefer a subtle look of elegance, Tibbits says they generally use warm white light. Effective use of subtle lighting can include deck lighting and soft downlighting such as a single spotlight directed onto a water feature.

Tibbits says a friendly conversation with a lighting expert will usually reveal what kind of lighting best suits the homeowner.

"One other great thing about patio lighting using either trend is that you can not only highlight the things you want to see (steps, potted plants, water features), but you can also make other things you don't want to see (electrical apparatus and pool equipment) disappear," he added.

For more information, contact Premier Outdoor Lighting at (813) 672-4911.

AT A GLANCE



COHDRA

Lantana is a hardy, sun- and drought-tolerant plant that comes in myriad colors from fiery orange to a cool lavender. As a bonus, it attracts butterflies.

Late start gardening

By ELYSE KELLY

TAMPA.BLOCKSHOPPER.COM

Life can get busy, and there are many reasons why nonessentials like a summer flower garden can be put off. This doesn't mean a garden can't be started late. Marjia Kuzmic of Landscape-Fusion offers some great options for late start gardening in Florida.

"In central Florida we have nearly year-round growing seasons," Kuzmic said. "The time of year for plantings depends mostly on plants' growing season or availability, not on overall growing conditions."

Because the sun can be harsh on young plants in summer, she suggests choosing plants like bougainvillea, lantana and dipladenia, which all like full sun and are fairly drought tolerant. Other choices are Mexican sage and cassia, also known as Senna alata, a great option because it flowers in late summer and fall.

To help a late garden get going, Kuzmic suggests fertilizing with organic fertilizer and compost since there is a ban on fertilizers containing nitrogen and phosphates from June 1 to Sept. 30. In addition, during the hottest months or when daily rain does not occur, make sure the new plants are given extra water. She adds that most full sun plants need to be watered twice daily the first 30 days until established.

For more information, contact Landscape-Fusion at (813) 399-3634.