

A homeowner's guide to a year-round deck

(BPT) - During the warm summer months, having an outdoor deck for barbecues and gatherings with family and friends is a great addition to any backyard. The approach of cool weather may signal the end of barbecue season, but homeowners can still use their deck after the warm temperatures have passed.

"Although decks are generally a summer attraction, there are ways to make them accessible during the winter as well," says Stephen McNally, TAMKO Building Products Inc.'s vice president of sales and marketing. -

There are many ways to make your deck functional and enjoyable during the winter, no matter where your home is located. -

Step 1 - Warm up your deck

The addition of a fireplace can transform your deck into an outdoor gathering spot and a scene-stealing area for those cool nights. The type of fireplace you decide on for your deck can add beauty and charm as well as complement your existing color scheme and deck furniture and decorations. Outdoor fireplaces can be made from stone, brick, tile or even granite, so the color options are endless.

"Outdoor fireplaces can be big, beautiful and elaborate, but there are other options for homeowners who prefer

to keep their outdoor living space simple," McNally says.

If a large outdoor fireplace is not for you, but you want to enjoy your deck on cool winter nights, consider the addition of a fire pit, fire bowl or even a chiminea.

Structural safety and potential fire hazards are serious considerations when deciding on a fireplace, so having your deck inspected before you begin installing an outdoor fireplace is suggested. If you install an outdoor fireplace of any kind, make sure that it is done to the manufacturer's standards.

Step 2 - Reducing summer dirt and grime

As the summer months come to an end, your deck is due for a well-deserved, thorough cleaning. Fall is a great time for this necessary chore because other outdoor tasks, like gardening and mowing, usually begin to decrease.

"Semi-annual cleaning of your deck is part of the required maintenance that reduces dirt, dust, grime and other residue build-up that the summer months have left behind," McNally says. -

Use a garden hose to rinse your deck. A fan-tip nozzle works best, but make sure the pressure from the hose does not exceed the manufacturers regulations. Ensure that you have removed all food and trash par-



ticles from the summer so that they do not contribute to build-up over the winter. For TAMKO's EverGrain decking products, use a nozzle with pressure that does not exceed 1,000 psi.

While rinsing your deck can reduce dirt and grime buildup, water alone will not remove the stains that have appeared on your deck. Cooking oil, suntan oil and other greasy substances can stain your deck over the course summer use. But be-

fore applying cleaner to your deck, make sure to test it in an inconspicuous spot to ensure that it will not change the coloring of your deck boards.

Step 3 - Spice up plant life

When it comes to enjoying outdoor living, beauty is everything. A well-installed deck can offer a certain aesthetic appeal by itself, but plant life can make a big dif-

ference, even in the winter time.

When the cool temperatures of late fall start to move in, you can help your plants extend their life. Move them closer to your house, ideally under a roof, to delay when they are hit by frost. If you have time before a frost sets in, help protect your plants by covering them with lightweight blankets or plastic sheets overnight and uncover them in the morning.

If you want to decorate

with plants during the cool months, there are a variety of colorful, cool vegetables that make handsome pot-fillers. Consider plants with purple and dark-green leaves like beets, Chinese cabbage, kale, mustard, spinach or even herbs. Mixing several types of plants together in the same pot can have a nice effect and the addition of garden art statues can add a pop of color.

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EMAIL:

sentinel@lewistownsentinel.com
ads@lewistownsentinel.com

www.lewistownsentinel.com

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