

Decks pay great dividends for all homeowners

Whether the stock market is up or down, homeowners can still find one investment with an almost certain positive return: the backyard deck.

For anyone interested in adding a deck to their home, the local builder is a good place to get started. The builder offers plenty of advice to help you create a deck that you can enjoy for a long time.

Of course, there are the dollars and cents of it as well. If you sell the house, you can recoup about 70 percent of the deck's cost (assuming you've kept the deck in good shape). But the non-monetary returns are just as impressive. The makers of Thompson's Water Seal deck-care products have received thousands of letters from homeowners recounting the emotional and social benefits they've enjoyed from their decks.

If you want to keep your deck's "stock" on the rise, Dr. Victoria Scarborough, a chemist with Thompson's Water Seal, has the following tips:

- Don't wait to protect a new deck. "There's a common myth that new lumber should weather for six months to a year before being water-proofed, and that's totally false," said Scarborough. "Under most conditions, the wood can begin deteriorating even in that short span of time."

- Clean your deck. Always clean your deck before treating it. Not only does it make the deck look better, it will help the waterproofer penetrate the wood for maximum protection.

- Consider the (colorful) possibilities. There are many options for creating a deck look that's unique to your home. Clear waterproofer will stop water damage while letting the color of the wood take center stage.

Tinted coatings — sometimes called toners — are sheer, wood-toned waterproofer that are growing in popularity. Semitransparent and solid stains come in dozens of traditional and non-traditional colors, including blue, green and black. Consider using multiple colors of deck coatings to create distinctive patterns of color. (There's no need to apply a clear waterproofer over a stain — just check the label and be certain that the stain you're buying is water-repellent.)

- Plan a one-day deck makeover. Breakthroughs in waterproofing technology now make it possible in many instances to clean and treat your deck in one day, so you can begin enjoying your deck dividends even sooner. Thompson's Water Seal has introduced a line of waterproofer called Thompson's Water Seal Advanced waterproofer, which can be applied within two hours of cleaning a deck. The line offers maximum-strength waterproofing muscle, combined with time and labor-saving features such as a one-coat formula, exceptional long-lasting protection, soap and water cleanup and low odor. It's available in a clear formula and in five natural colors for wood and a multi-surface formula for use on wood, brick and concrete.

- Ask a friend for help. The Thompson's Water Seal Web site (www.thompsonsonline.com) is ready to provide in-depth assistance to help you get your project finished successfully. From a five-day weather forecast customized for your area (so you'll know the best days to tackle the job) to a form where you can e-mail specific questions, you've always got a friend when it comes to your deck.