

OILING EXTERIOR WOOD EASY AND EFFECTIVE OPTION

Exterior wood is risky stuff. Everyone's happy with the look of it at first, but as aging sets in things often get ugly. This is especially true if the wood's been coated in a film-forming finish because sooner or later these always peel. Sanding and scraping are required to get back to square one, and this is usually a job that's way worse than finish reapplication. But there is one little-known approach for finishing outdoor wood that's fast, effective and relatively easy. It involves a process of sanding and oiling that I've put into practice several times, and I know it works just as well on new wood as old. It creates a fresher, richer look, with no possibility of peeling or ongoing maintenance dependency.

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ADVANTAGES OF EXTERIOR OIL

Speed and ease of application are the main advantages of oiling exterior wood. The process usually begins with sanding, especially if you're dealing with a grey, weathered surface. That's because the visible, grey fibers are always somewhat loose, and they need to be removed before oiling for best results. The oiling strategy works well for most exterior wood surfaces, and the Bosch 1250DEVS is the fastest and most powerful hand-held random orbit sander I know of. It's perfect for dealing with larger, outdoor surfaces.



Oiling is one of the only finishing options that endures on previously weathered outdoor wood. Oil is easy to apply and never peels. Maintenance simply involves slushing on more oil if and when you like.

Photo credit: Steve Maxwell

This model spins a 6-inch diameter sanding disk that works much faster than the more common 5-inch sanders. Like all random orbit sanders, the 1250DEVS uses a circular sanding pad while also moving the pad back-and-forth in an orbital pattern at the same time. The combination of rotating and orbiting movements increases sanding speed while reducing surface scratching of the wood. The uncommon thing about the 1250DEVS is its two orbital settings. Dial in the coarser setting for maximum sanding speed, or the finer setting that makes the sander easier to hold and control in close quarters. You'll find 80-grit sanding disks work best for preparing outdoor wood. There's no need for anything finer.

NO-PREP REFINISHING

With wood sanded, it's time for a finish, and this is where mistakes are often made.

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As I mentioned before, many finishes form a surface film, and this usually leads to peeling and a big prep job removing the ugly finish later on. Although oil isn't used very often for outdoor wood, it is the best choice for a casual-but-cared-for look. It enhances the appearance of old wood and new, and it never peels. Maintenance is just a matter of applying more oil, if you want to. Don't feel like keeping up with the oiling regime? No problem. Leave the wood alone and it simply resumes weathering as the oil wears out. No peeling, no worse-than-before mess. Oiling is especially good for outdoor wood furniture, since all the nooks, crannies and spaces between slats, legs and arms are almost impossible to strip properly when paint or varnish peels.

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BRUSH OR SPRAY APPLICATION

Last spring two of my boys and I joined a volunteer work crew sprucing up a 20-year-old wooden play structure, and we used a combination of sanding and Minwax Teak Oil to rejuvenate surfaces. Although this product isn't specifically rated for decks, it proved easy to use and effective, even on the horizontal, deck-like floor surfaces of the structure.

We did our application work with a brush, though spray equipment was also used on larger areas of the project. Since the oil soaks in quickly, there's never any worries



The 6-inch Bosch 1250DEVS is one of the best random orbit sanders for large jobs. It's much more powerful than 5-inch sanders and includes variable motor speed and two-position orbital action. Flip the red lever to the left (as shown) and it removes material more quickly than the easier-to-control, reduced orbit position to the right.

Photo credit: Steve Maxwell

about drips or runs. You'll find that exterior oils like this continue looking good for about a year. The real advantage is that renewal is simply a matter of putting on more oil, with no need for sanding first.

Exterior wood regularly disappoints people because the hidden workload of finishing and refinishing with paint or varnish is massive. I've yet to see anything better than simple, reliable and under-appreciated oiling. It certainly deserves to be better known.

Steve Maxwell, syndicated home improvement and woodworking columnist, has shared his DIY tips, how-to videos and product reviews since 1988. Follow "Canada's Handiest Man" at SteveMaxwell.ca, Facebook or @Maxwells_Tips on Twitter.

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