

Advice for the Home Team Toolbox

by Dr. Debi Warner



Dear Dr. Debi,
We think we want a deck on our house. They look so nice. Should we build one?
Signed, Just a House Now

Dear Deckless,

Building a deck is a great home project that increases the value and enjoyment of your home and it is also great fun to build.

You can design a deck for any ability level; and that is so satisfying. From a simple small square that holds some chairs, to multi-levels that arch up toward the sky, you can use your imagination and practical skills together to make some dreams come true in short time.

Most lumber stores have ready designs for decks that even include the stick estimate (that is the list of lumber materials). You can also find beautiful design books that will inspire as well as help you gauge your ability to handle various methods. You can talk with folks you know about your house and your ideas, and sort through your abilities.

If you have chosen a deck that is within your ability, you will find just about every step to be satisfying. And there are plenty of people to help you choose the plan to start with, especially if you tell them what you are able to do. Many folks will help you succeed by pointing you toward resources that will fill in your skill gaps, so listen to them.

I love building a deck because the elements of construction are so apparent. It is rather pure in its form, with supports and surfaces that make sense. You can see the posts and carrier beams – they clearly hold the load. Then the joists span the spaces to define where the floors will be. Finally, you fill in those floors with just one sensible layer that brings sturdiness and provides a useful surface – all in one layer.

It is elegant in that it makes sense to the eye and to the builder. No hidden parts, no secrets, not many rules – it just makes sense. That is satisfying to most of us who deal with a large bureaucracy of rules everyday, or just get to work on one cog of the wheel. With a deck, you

get to experience the whole picture – start to finish and enjoy it too, all in a short time.

Few of us can walk past a box of our children's blocks or Legos without putting at least some small structure together. (It's not just me – I am sure!) When you build a deck, you get to finish the game, and then play in it.

Among the many simple joys is the easy task of cutting the balusters (the pieces that become the little fence along the edge of the deck). I enjoy measuring the first one to length, and then use that piece as a gauge, using a chop or radial saw to do the next 100 pieces.

It feels so fine to line up the distant end of the piece by touch of the finger, and move the other ends carefully up to the blade (with the power off). With the gauging-piece on top, pushing the pieces far enough to bring the cut piece to rest gently against the blade leaves the perfect space for the kerf of the cut. It just feels so fine to check the pieces after the cut, and notice with your fingers how very close they are. Of course this is much more precise than balusters need to be, so you get going, and don't check them all. But Ooh, just one of those joyful pauses in construction.

As you engage with your deck project, take some time to notice which little moments are gratifying for you. You might not be able to put it into words. But you can stop and savor, and let the activity of the project replenish your attitude and energy. Let these sink in. Put a bookmark there in your mind – and you will be able to visit it later, another day, in the winter or at work, or when you just need a renovation 'fix.'

Taking some time with your Home Team (to divide up the tasks and to plan the project times) can help make the days smooth, especially if you also included wholesome refreshments and rest in the balance. Be sure to include a little communication time so you can catch up with new developments and encourage each other onward.

Soon you will be sitting on your deck and enjoying the sweetest days and evenings of summer, sipping a cool beverage and musing about your next dream project.

Happy Home Team!

Dr. Debi

Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.

Dr. Debi has a consultation practice, from her studio in Littleton, NH, with house calls all over the East coast.

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