



DECKING INSTALLATION GUIDE

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Important Facts

Blue Star decking is a kiln-dried hardwood. It behaves differently than cedar, pressure-treated lumber, or composite products.

- It will not shrink significantly after installation
- It will expand slightly side-to-side when wet

The most important concepts to keep in mind: **your deck needs to breathe, and boards should be finished on all surfaces before installation.** Proper airflow and finishing help prevent problems that can occur when wood naturally expands and contracts as it assumes and expels moisture.

*While you can apply your own finish, **we recommend Blue Star PLUS factory-coated decking.** See “Finishing Your Deck” section for information about our prefinished decking or instructions on applying your own finishing.*

Storage and Handling

Your lumber will arrive **clean, dry, and ready to use**—keeping it that way is important.

- Store boards flat and off the ground
- Keep them clean and dry
- Avoid leaving boards loose or exposed to weather

Site Design & Ventilation

Good ventilation is critical for long-term performance.

- Elevate the deck at least 18 inches above grade. If elevated under 3 feet, we recommend 4" decking for maximum ventilation
- Design for free airflow beneath the deck and out the top

If using skirting, choose open materials like lattice to allow cross ventilation. Avoid enclosing the deck completely, and be sure to vent stair risers as well.

Proper drainage matters too. Grade the soil away from the structure and ensure water flows away easily—this helps prevent moisture buildup beneath your deck.

Workability

Blue Star hardwoods are easy to work with. Cut and machine using standard tools. No need for carbide or other special blades or bits.

Framing & Joist Spacing

Standard framing is 16" maximum on center, but 12" on center is recommended for added strength and reduced waste. If you're installing boards at an angle, always frame 12" on center.

Always follow local building codes when installing any building material.

Board Gapping

Because kiln-dried hardwood expands slightly from side to side when wet, spacing is important.

- 5/4 x 6 boards: space 1/4" apart
- 5/4 x 4 and 1 x 4 boards: space 3/16" apart
- Butt boards tight end-to-end

Fastening Deck Boards

Before installing, take a moment to look at both faces of each board and choose the side you prefer as the finished surface.

The traditional and most reliable method for fastening is face screwing with 316-grade stainless steel decking screws. Screws should penetrate about 1-1/2" into the joists. Place screws about 3/4" from edges and ends, at a slight angle. Pre-drilling is recommended, and especially important at board ends to prevent splitting. Use:

- Two screws per board at each joist
- Consider three screws at the ends of 6" boards

You can choose trim head or flat head screws, depending on your preferred look. For a more finished appearance, systems like the Pro Plug system (Starborn) can be used to conceal fasteners.

Hidden Fasteners

Modern hidden fastener systems can perform well when designed and used properly. Best results come from steel fastener systems that fasten through the board edges at an angle, directly into the joists. Always follow manufacturer instructions when using any building materials.

Ask your retailer about our edge-grooved decking for use with hidden fasteners.

Finishing Your Deck

Initial Application

To ensure proper installation and lasting results, apply a penetrating oil finish to all surfaces—faces, sides, and all ends—before installation. A second coating shortly after installation, applied only to top faces and exposed ends, is recommended: this practice will increase performance over time.

Initial application helps the wood:

- Adjust more gradually to outdoor conditions
- Reduce stress from moisture movement
- Improve long-term appearance and performance

Deck finishes do not seal wood—they penetrate the fibers, slowing moisture absorption and release. Most finishes also include UV protection. While there are many viable deck finishes on the market, we strongly recommend Messmer's UV PLUS for Hardwoods (Natural).

What to Expect Over Time

Finishes will wear over time—they are not permanent, one-time coatings.

Performance depends on:

- Climate
- Sun exposure
- Product selection

To maintain a finished look, you'll need to reapply finish as needed. If you prefer, you can allow your deck to weather to a natural silver color. We still recommend an initial coating. It will gradually wear away, and the silver tone will typically begin to appear after about one year, depending on your environment.

Factory-Coated Option - Blue Star PLUS

To save time and ensure consistency, ask your retailer about Blue Star PLUS.

These boards are:

- Pre-coated with Messmer's UV PLUS for Hardwoods
- Finished on a precision-controlled production line
- Fully coated on all surfaces

Machine coated decking is more uniform, reduces labor, and saves cost - it will outperform hand coating every time.

Bottom Line

Focus on **airflow, proper spacing and fastening, and quality finishing**. Get those right from the start, and your deck will perform better—and look better—for years to come.