

Teak Deck Care: Cleaning, Caulking Checks and Longevity

Woodwork · Beginner · Half a day

A teak deck wears out from cleaning far more often than from use. Every aggressive wash removes soft grain and takes thickness off boards you cannot replace cheaply — the gentlest method that works is always the right one.

Tools and materials

- ☐ Soft bristle deck brush (never a stiff or wire brush)
- ☐ Mild teak cleaner or plain salt water and washing-up liquid
- ☐ Bucket and plenty of fresh water
- ☐ Caulking compound for spot repairs
- ☐ Sharp chisel and teak plugs

1. Never pressure wash

- ☐ A pressure washer blasts out the soft summer grain between the hard grain lines, leaving a ridged, grooved deck that then holds dirt worse than before.
- ☐ It also lifts caulking edges and drives water under the seams. One afternoon with a pressure washer can cost years of deck life.

2. Wash across the grain, gently

- ☐ Wet the deck, apply a mild cleaner and scrub lightly ACROSS the grain with a soft brush. Scrubbing along the grain digs out the soft wood.
- ☐ Salt water is genuinely good for teak — it keeps the wood slightly damp and discourages growth. A rinse with seawater and a soft brush is often all a deck needs.
- ☐ Rinse thoroughly with fresh water afterwards so no cleaner residue is left sitting in the seams.

3. Check the caulking and plugs

- ☐ Run a thumbnail along each seam. Caulking that has lifted at one edge lets water down to the substrate and the fastenings below — cut it out and re-caulk that section before it spreads.
- ☐ Look for missing or proud plugs over the screw heads. A missing plug means water straight onto a fastening; chisel the recess clean, glue in a new teak plug with the grain aligned and pare it flush once cured.

4. Measure what you have left

- ☐ Teak decks are typically laid at 10-12 mm. Once the wood has worn down close to the screw heads or below about 4 mm, cleaning is no longer the question — the deck needs relaying.
- ☐ Check the depth at the seams with a thin ruler once a season so the decision is not a surprise.

5. Oil, seal, or leave it bare

- ☐ Leaving teak bare to weather silver-grey is the lowest maintenance option and does the wood no harm at all. Most professional advice on working boats is to do exactly this.
- ☐ Oil looks warm and rich but needs redoing every few months, and in a damp climate it can encourage black mould growth.
- ☐ Sealers last longer than oil but wear patchily and are awkward to touch up. Whatever you choose, apply thin and wipe off any excess before it goes tacky.

Notes
