

by James\_Dulley

Dear Jim: Our wood deck gets hot, almost too warm to be comfortable, in the summer sun. It seems to make adjacent rooms hotter. I am also tired of the maintenance. What decking options do I have to keep it cooler? -Ron H. Dear Ron: An old dark discolored deck can become comfortably warm in the summer. This heat will reradiate in through windows and make your house walls warmer. If the prevailing breezes are over the hot deck, you will not be able to open windows for natural ventilation and instead will use energy-guzzling air-conditioning. You actually have quite a few options for keeping the deck cooler and reducing or eliminating regular deck maintenance. If you have priced high-quality deck treating chemicals lately, you know how expensive it can be to keep a wood deck well-maintained. Also, treating a deck is not a fun task. The option you select will depend somewhat upon your budget. All alternative decking materials are going to be more expensive to install than new pressure-treated decking lumber. The life-cycle cost of them is sometimes lower though because of their long life and less maintenance. One of the least expensive options is roll-out vinyl deck sheeting. This is available in several colors and the rolls are from 54 to 72 inches wide. It is made of two layers of ultraviolet-resistant vinyl laminated to a polyester or fiberglass mat. It has a rough surface for good traction and will keep the surface cooler. Another more expensive option is to replace the existing wood with vinyl decking. Vinyl decking continues to look good with very little maintenance. It has a rough surface texture so it is safe to walk on even when it is wet. The vinyl will stay cooler because the planks are hollow so air flows through them. The relatively thin vinyl also has a lower heat capacity. Once you pry off the old wood planks, there are several methods to install the vinyl. A simple do-it-yourself method to get perfect spacing is to install tracks along the wood joists. The vinyl planks are designed to snap into the tracks. This looks clean because the track fasteners are hidden. Another vinyl option to hide the fasteners is a tongue-and-groove design. Many composite solid decking materials, which use a combination of wood fibers and recycled plastic materials, are available. These are low-maintenance, but they have many of the same thermal characteristics as wood. Selecting a lighter color will reduce the heat buildup in the sun. Since vinyl is not damaged by moisture as wood can be, place planters on the edges of the deck. The evaporation of the moisture given off from the plants can lower the air temperature around your deck and house. The following companies offer vinyl and alternative decking materials: Anchor Decking, (888) 898-4990, [www.durabledeck.com](http://www.durabledeck.com); Global Dec-k-ing, (800) 804-6288, [www.globaldecking.com](http://www.globaldecking.com); TimberTech, (800) 307-7780, [www.timbertech.com](http://www.timbertech.com); Trex, (800) 289-8739, [www.trex.com](http://www.trex.com); and Thermal Industries, (800) 245-1540, [www.thermalindustries.com](http://www.thermalindustries.com).

Dear Jim: I have remodeled my bathroom and I am installing an attractive cast iron bathtub. I was told it will require more hot water for a bath because of the metal. Should I put insulation under the bathtub? - Ron B. Dear Ron: Cast iron bathtubs are attractive, but they are not the most energy efficient option for a bath. It takes a lot of hot water just to heat up the cast iron. For showering, it is not a major issue. Installing insulation under it will not help much. Standard tubs are made of steel which transfers heat at about the same rate as cast iron. Actually, once the cast iron is warmed up, its mass will hold its heat well.

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