

Tales from the Crawlspace

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Summer Maintenance

It's summer! At least that's what my calendar tells me...

It's time for long weekend afternoons on the deck, patio or backyard. Everyone's going out to explore, ride bikes, etc. Although our summers in the PNW are awesome, they don't last forever. There are things we need to do at this time of year that really can't be done at other times. You really have to budget your time to be sure and get the necessary maintenance stuff done now or the time for it will slip away. Let's start with our terrific decks and fencing. If you have cedar or other wood like most, every 3 years or so they need stain seal service. The best, most proven method is to pressure wash them clean, when dry, spray the stain on with a garden type sprayer and back roll with a roller. Use a brush to get into nooks and crannies. Be sure and give the surfaces plenty of time to dry out after pressure washing them. If you don't the stain will be uneven and not take well. Do not be fooled into not staining and letting them "go grey". This will shorten the expected useful surface life of your deck or fence by 1/2 or less. It also keeps the wood more porous (makes it a better sponge) to absorb more water and bacteria causing eventual dry rot damage. Exposed wood needs maintenance, get used to it. If you have trex or some other composite material, you still have to maintain it. This stuff is less maintenance than cedar but not, NO maintenance. If you let fungus grow on it, it will discolor and spoil its appearance badly. It's really best to keep plants from being in contact with this stuff all together. Having planters on trex is bad news, if you don't regularly clean it with an anti-fungal cleaner. The problem is trex and other composites are made of recycled materials containing organic materials; wood chips and paper, etc. This stuff will rot and turn the planks black. It's horrendous to fix it and it never really looks right again. You have to use a fungicide to kill the mold growing inside the material turning it black, and then stain the planks. Like I said avoid problems by keeping it clean in

the 1st place. If you have a new or newer house, the builders almost never stain the wood decks balconies or fences. This is because (truly) when they are new, the wood won't absorb much stain and won't "take" well. If you let them be weathered or "seasoned", SLIGHTLY (no more than one season) the wood will open up, become more porous and absorb more stain, giving it much better protection. However, if you wait too long the wood begins to go grey and you have to bleach it out to get it back to its natural color so you can stain it and get a good finish color. It's better to not let it go too long and stain it. If your bare wood is up before the mid-summer, be sure and stain it before the summer is over.

The other important thing to be sure and do is exterior paint or paint touch up around the house. Inspect all the exposed wood around your house and if there are any cracked, peeling or blistering areas, they need service before things get really wet again. Be sure and scrape the damaged paint, caulk the seams and apply paint to seal the wood. If you don't have any paint left around, just tear off a small piece from a damaged area, any decent paint store can match it pretty well and you shouldn't notice the touched up areas. Be sure and check the fascia and soffits of the roof. These areas have the most problems and are where dry rot damage will likely start. Surprisingly few people actually get right up close to a home's exterior walls and look straight up under the soffits. It's important that you do. If they are high, use binoculars. You would be surprised how useful binoculars can be to inspect even small buildings from the ground. If you have high soffits you might want to hire someone to get up there and paint them. Working on top of a 36' ladder can be a little hard on your nerves if you're not used to it. Either way, if you have really looked things over yourself, you'll be much more confident when talking to contractors and you'll really know if they've done a thorough job afterward.

If you were paying attention, during the heavy raining season you will know what's going on with your gutters. If you weren't, the next thunderstorm with heavy rain put on your raincoat and a broad brimmed hat. Go around and inspect your house. Look at the entire perimeter of the house and make sure all the downspouts are working, taking water at least 3' away from the house. Be sure

there aren't any parts of the gutters that are leaking or over flowing. Damaged gutters can be one of the most destructive things on a house. It's really a lot nicer to work on them in the dry weather. Seal the seams and leaks with proper gutter caulk (I like DAP Butyl-Flex caulk). Correct any sagging or poorly supported gutter sections, add leaders as needed. I know it's hard to work on the gutters when the sun is shining but it's actually a great occupation on the outside and it's a miserable job in the rain. The payoff is when it's raining in the fall; you'll be very self-satisfied, almost smug. You should be you'll have earned it.