

# “Alternative” Decking Products Stand Up to Florida Sunshine

By John Bauer, Correspondent

We all know only too well how brutal our sub tropic conditions can be for just about anything left outside in our weather. Our decks and docks in Southwest Florida are subjected to constant high heat, humidity, daily rain showers and intense ultra-violet radiation. So it's no surprise that traditional pressure treated lumber just doesn't hold up well as a deck board. It tends to warp, crack, splinter and fade despite our best efforts to regularly apply stains and preservatives to protect the surface.

There has been a lot of interest in the past few years in “alternative” decking materials, manufactured from plastics and other recycled materials, that strive to look beautiful for years with minimal maintenance. “Our customers want a product that will stay looking great with minimal maintenance, and these new materials really deliver on that promise,” said Ron Paluck, owner of Shoreline Lumber in Ft. Meyers.

Customers have become more knowledgeable about alternative decking, and the products now far surpass sales of pressure treated lumber, according to Ron. Alternative decking can cost 2-3 times the initial cost of pressure treated lumber, but quickly pay back the added investment with its longer life and reduced maintenance costs. This article should help homeowners understand the differences between the most popular alternative decking on the market - each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Composite Decking was first introduced in the early 1990's. Manufactured under brands like Trex™, EverGrain™ and TimberTech™, these products are made from a mixture of recycled plastics and wood or other cellulose/organic fillers. The recycled plastics come from a variety of sources like plastic shopping bags, shrink wrap, and the fillers may be wood fiber or flour from sawdust, flax or other organic materials. The early wood/plastic composites solved many of the problems of pressure treated

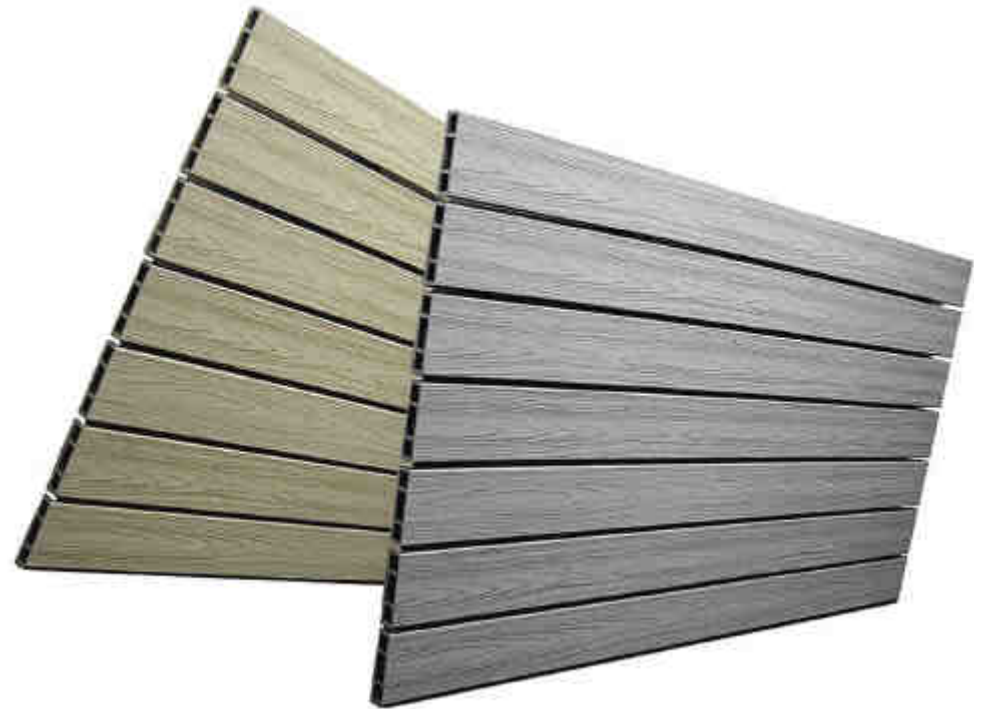
lumber by reducing cracking and splitting and providing a longer life span with reduced maintenance. Recent versions of wood composites in the marketplace have come a long way in addressing some of the early shortcomings that included susceptibility to fading, staining, mildew and other moisture absorption issues from the organic fillers.

Newer versions of composites contain fungicides and U.V. stabilizers to better protect the wood and slow the color fading process. Trex was an early pioneer in composite decking and carries a 25 year limited commercial warranty. Visit [www.trex.com](http://www.trex.com)

**Advantages:** Long lasting; no splintering, cracking or warping; made from recycled materials; dimensionally stable. Least expensive alternative decking.

**Disadvantages:** Color fading is part of the expected aging process; can absorb stains and show scratches. Requires cleaning or periodic treatments to maintain new look. Cellular PVC Decking is a relatively new product which incorporates a hard skin that resists moisture, stains and scratches. Manufactured under brands like Azek Deck™ and TimberTech™ XLM, it is a vast improvement over hollow PVC decking that did not look like natural wood and tended to be “noisy”.

Cellular PVC decking tends to be more UV stable than wood composites and has a surface coating that is highly resistant to moisture, scratches and stains. The inside of the boards may have organic fillers that can be susceptible to staining and mold or mildew on exposed ends or areas where the surface has been penetrated. Unlike most wood composites, PVC decking is made from virgin material - not recycled, and there are some concerns about polyvinyl chloride plastics. Azek is a well known brand of cellular decking products that has a 20 year limited



commercial warranty - visit [www.Azek.com](http://www.Azek.com)

**Advantages:** Long lasting, no splintering, cracking or warping. Highly stain and scratch resistant surface; lighter in weight than composites; dimensionally stable with improved UV stability over traditional wood composites.

**Disadvantages:** Not made from recycled plastics and considered the least “green” of the alternative decking materials. Limited sizes and colors available. 5/4 board cannot span 24” joists. Product may be discolored by some rubber mats and other non-porous materials.

HDPE Plastic Decking is manufactured primarily from recycled plastics, like those from milk bottles, and contains no wood or organic fillers. Manufactured under brand names like TanDeck™ and Durawood™, the products are impervious to moisture, stains and mildew. They require minimal maintenance and never need painting or staining, and U.V. stabilizers keep the colors looking new for years. 2x6 deck & dock boards can be used to retrofit pressure treated wood decks with a 24” joist to joist spans. Because

the products are made from 100% post-consumer HDPE plastic, they are considered the most environmentally friendly. Tangent Technologies produces TanDeck and offers a 50 year limited commercial warranty - visit [www.TanDeck.com](http://www.TanDeck.com)

**Advantages:** Long lasting; no splintering, cracking or warping. Impervious to moisture, stains, mold or mildew; best UV stability. Most variety of sizes and colors available. Spans 24” joists for new or retrofit decks/docks. Longest commercial warranty.

**Disadvantages:** Slightly more expensive than other alternative decking materials; heavier than treated lumber.

Shoreline Lumber is a supplier of decking, marine pilings, lumber, and hardware. Contact Ron Paluck at (239) 267-6857 or by email at [rvpaluck@comcast.net](mailto:rvpaluck@comcast.net). Visit [www.shorelinelumber.net](http://www.shorelinelumber.net)

