

## Constructing the Perfect Decking - An Asset to Any Garden

OK, so you have decided that you want some decking in the garden. A quick measure up, work out the area, get some decking planks and a few joists for the frame and away you go! STOP! Rushing things through without proper planning will lead to headaches later. The professionals know what they need instinctively, but the average gardener will need to plan things carefully.

The first step is to decide where the deck will be sited in the garden. Decking in shady spots can quickly become green and slippery so would need a different approach and materials to a deck that is in an open and sunny spot. Then decide on the function, lightly used decks will not need such heavy components as ones that are intended for daily use - there is no point in wasting money, materials and time overdoing it! Next, do a scale drawing on paper, that way, you can work out the exact dimensions. You can't expect the decking boards to fit a bearer (frame) of just any old size! Or at least not without a load of hassle cutting them lengthways. Remember to allow 2-5 mm space between each decking plank for expansion in hot weather.

You also need to consider the height of the decking, raised decks can require planning permission. And for any decking that is over about 60cm (600mm) high you should at the very least seek expert advice as it is harder to make sure the frame is safe and stable. Having a frame that rests on the ground is the safest and most solid solution.

OK, so the planning is sorted out, you can now buy the materials. Basically you get what you pay for so if you want a decent deck, buy decent quality materials. For high use decking, good quality materials are essential if you are to avoid disappointment. Joists for the frame should be 5cm (50mm) x 10cm (100mm) as a minimum. The timber should be seasoned and treated otherwise it will twist and rot. It is also a good idea to buy and lay a weed suppressing sheet beneath the frame. You could also consider protecting the frame against ground moisture, either with some waterproof sheeting or concrete. If the ground is really wet and remains so for most of the year, dig out 5-10 cm and replace with gravel. Lay the deck onto that to keep it drier.

Firstly, level the ground and compact the soil if necessary. Lay out the joists and edges of the frame and cut them to size. Make sure that the joists are spaced at no more than 40cm (400mm). Screw the frame together rather than nailing it, that will keep it stronger for longer. If you are raising the decking on pillars, the more the better but they should at least be spaced by no more than 1.25 metres. Remember to include a fall at a gradient of 1% i.e. for every metre, the decking should be 1cm lower. This slope is essential for drainage and should be away from any buildings that it is in contact with. If you include some diagonal joisting, the whole frame will have improved strength and be less springy.

The decking boards should be laid in as long lengths as possible as this is stronger and keeps the decking more rigid. The deck boards should be screwed to each joist, if they do twist, nails will pull out and the deck will lose its strength and integrity. To achieve the planned spacing between boards, you should cut some wooden spacers of the correct thickness. Finally, add vertical edging boards to exposed surfaces for a neater finish. These should be of good quality, seasoned and treated timber.

Then clean off your garden furniture and enjoy your new outside space!  
Remember, the whole project will stand or fall through the planning which is why the best decking should be left to the experts!

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