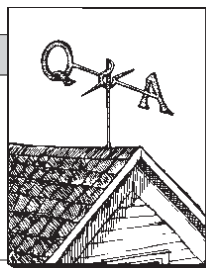


Wood Preservatives & Health Concerns

by Henry Spies



Q. Given government restrictions on creosote, pentachlorophenol and other wood preservatives, what is the best waterproofing material for building a porch? What about stains and paints? Are certain ones better than others?

A. The best material to use for porch construction is wood that has been pressure-treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA). Ammoniacal (ammonia-containing) copper arsenite (ACA) sometimes would be used with Douglas fir, but this combination would be rare in New England.

Care must be used with either kind of treated wood: handle it with gloves, wear eye protection, and don't burn the scraps. Cut ends should be brushed with or dipped in copper naphthenate, which is the best wood preservative approved for use by the public.

Some stains and paints are much better than others, but determining which is which borders on the impossible. By

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the time an exposure test is run on a painted fence, the manufacturer undoubtedly has changed the formula, rendering the results meaningless. We gave up on testing exterior paints on wood about 30 years ago for that reason. Major brands tend to be fairly consistent, however. Find one that you like, and stick with it.

Composting Toilets: How Effective?

Q. Do composting toilets really work? Why would anyone use them?

A. I suppose the answer depends upon what you mean by "work." They are praised by ecological extremists, but most public-health districts do not permit them.

Composting toilets are designed to provide an indoor outhouse that is nearly odorless. They're used where the water supply is inadequate even for a low-water-use, flush toilet, and where no sewage-disposal facilities are permitted other than holding tanks.

Vacation cabins located where soil conditions are such that a septic system would pollute lakes or groundwater supplies are among the most practical candidates for composting toilets, but again, check local codes.

Driveway Specifications

Q. Are there any rules of thumb for planning long driveways? I particularly am interested in any information you can give regarding widths, curves, slope, drainage and snow control.

A. The minimum outside radius for a single curved drive depends upon its width. A drive that is 96" wide should have a minimum outside radius of 55 feet; the minimum radius for a drive that is 106" wide is 31 feet, and for a drive that is 116" wide, 24'9". (These figures are for automobiles—not garbage trucks.)

The minimum slope should be 1/8" per foot in the direction of drainage either across or alongside the driveway. Ideally, the driveway should be sloped from the garage to the street. If there is no slope to the street, the drive can be sloped to the side, or to a drainage inlet or ditch, as required by the land contours.

The minimum widths for one- and two-car driveways used only for parking are 9'0" and 17'0", respectively. If the drive also is to be used as a walkway, the minimum widths are 11'8" and 19'8". Recommended widths are three feet wider than the minimums.

Snow control is dictated primarily by the land contours, the placement of structures and the landscaping.

Information about the driveway dimensions necessary for turnarounds and for side- and rear-entrance garages is contained in our Circular C5.9, "Garages and Carports." It is available for \$1 from the Small Homes Council-Building Research Council, 1 East St. Mary's Rd., Champaign, Ill. 61820.

From a practical standpoint, there's no way to control the ability of wood to absorb or desorb moisture. Regardless of what you do, it will absorb (or desorb) moisture until it reaches equilibrium with its surroundings.

Moisture-Resistant Finishes for Wood

Q. What kind of finish is best for controlling moisture in wood?

A. The only good solution is to soak the wood in polypropylene glycol, but this isn't practical because the chemical is not readily available, and it is too expensive. (In fact, the chemical primarily is used to preserve works of art made of or

mounted on wood.)

From a practical standpoint, there is no way to control the ability of wood to absorb or desorb moisture. Regardless of what you do, it will absorb (or desorb) moisture until it reaches equilibrium with the relative humidity of its surroundings. Paints, stains and water repellents only slow the absorption, allowing water a chance to evaporate or run off.

No Simple Answer on Siding

Q. What type of exterior siding is best suited to the climate of New England?

A. What type of person makes the best spouse?

Seriously, so many factors are involved that a single, generic response is impossible. The "best" type of siding depends not only on climate and other factors, but also on the aesthetic preferences of the owners (and the degree of maintenance they are willing to provide over the lifetime of the siding). ■

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