

Mildew & Paint

Q. Which paints are more mildew-resistant, oil-based or acrylic? How can I prevent mildew from growing on painted surfaces?

A. Bill Feist, formerly a research chemist at the USDA Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wis., responds: Some paints are more vulnerable than others to attack by mildew fungi. For example, with most types of paint, mildew grows more quickly on exterior flat paints than on exterior semigloss or high-gloss enamels. Also, alkyd and oil-based paints have more of a tendency to grow mildew than acrylic latex paints because the resins and oils in these paints are food sources for the mildew organisms. Of the available water-based paints, acrylic latex is usually considered the most resistant to mildew.

However, this doesn't mean that acrylic paints will resist mildew indefinitely. In most climates, any paint, whether acrylic or oil-based, that contains a mildewcide will eventually support mildew growth as the mildewcides break down. For exterior wood, you should always use paints and primers that contain a mildewcide (most high-quality exterior paints are formulated with mildewcides). In hot, humid climates, where the mildew problem can get quite severe, it's probably a good idea to have the paint store mix in extra mildewcide, such as M-1 Additive, made by the Jomaps Co. (6500 Industrial Way, Alpharetta, GA 30201; 770/442-8808) and sold in Sherwin-Williams stores.

Low Flows & Waste Lines

Q. Do low-flow toilets generate enough water to carry solids through the soil pipe to the city sewage line or the septic system?

With so little water being flushed, my concern is that in older homes with cast iron pipes, corrosion in the pipe may catch the solids and cause blockage.

A. Master plumber Rex Cauldwell responds: The small volume of flushing water that's available to carry the waste down the pipes is a potential problem, and you are wise to be concerned. With a smooth pipe, such as PVC, there isn't a significant problem until you start using very long runs with large-diameter lines (4 inches or larger). With cast iron, you may have a problem from the onset, because the interior surface is rough and the water does not flow smoothly. Short runs usually present no problem, but long runs can.

You mention older pipes. Actually, if the cast iron has been in for a few years, it has built up a scum on the inside to help smooth out the flow. But there is still no doubt that 1.6 gallons may not be enough water to carry the waste for the entire length of the sewer line by itself.

As you've guessed, there are some tricks we plumbers use to keep ourselves out of trouble. I still do what my Uncle Bud taught me in the 1950s: I always design the system so the waste line of the 1.6 is scoured by another fixture upstream. This way the additional water from the other fixture will always clean the line — it's just common sense. If this is your situation, you should be okay.

If you have a toilet by itself at the end of a long run of cast iron, you may need a pressure-assist toilet to increase the velocity of the flush. In some cases, the pressurized tank will still not be enough to solve the problem. For example, in my own house, I have a run of more than 250 feet of PVC to the septic tank — 1.6 gallons, pressure-

assist or not, simply won't work. For such "big problem" cases, plumbers have been known to modify the toilet to increase the water flow. I never buy a 1.6 that can't be modified. Talk to your plumber about this if you think you've got a major problem situation.

Oozing Knotholes in PT Deck

Q. Is there anything that can be done, short of tear-out and replacement, to prevent the knotholes in pressure-treated pine decking from oozing on hot days?

A. Paul R. Fiset, director of the wood technology program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, responds: The sap in the knotholes softens and begins to run as it is heated by the sun. Sap is composed of liquid and solid materials. If it is heated to 160°F while it is being kiln-dried, the volatile liquid substances will flash off, leaving the solids behind in a hardened state. Once the sap has set, it will never run again. This doesn't help you now, however, since the wood in your deck was obviously not kiln-dried at a high enough temperature during production.

There are a couple of options. You can wait it out; sooner or later the sap will stop running out of the wood. In the meantime, you can clean it up with turpentine. Or you can try to set the sap in the knots using a heat gun. Just be careful not to start a fire or singe the wood.



GOT A QUESTION?

Send it to On the House, JLC, 932 West Main St., Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to jlc@bginet.com.