

HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

Eliminate Unsightly Mildew—Easy As 1-2-3

(NAPSA)—In certain weather conditions, your home could be a breeding ground for mildew—an unsightly airborne fungus that thrives in damp areas.

Mold and mildew are various forms of fungus that can settle on any surface and, under the right conditions, grow or colonize on that surface. Mildew can cause discoloration and, if left untreated, may even deteriorate certain building materials.

Mildew is part of the environment in which we live. Mildew spores, which are similar to seeds, are microscopic and therefore difficult to detect until the spores colonize. The spores are transported easily by air currents, insects, animals and water. They will thrive when they have food, moisture, air (oxygen), and temperatures between 40 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit. It is impossible to totally control these four elements in an outdoor environment.

If you have a wood deck or wood siding on your home, you should know that it can be costly to repair wood surfaces affected by mildew that are left untreated for extended periods. Therefore, it's important to take early measures to remove fungal growth. By properly cleaning, treating and coating your wood surfaces, you will protect your real estate investment with periodic maintenance.

Spotting a mildew problem

In early stages, mildew is often transparent. When it is visible, you will see a black, brown or sometimes whitish fungal growth. Outside the home, mildew forms most often on areas that tend to be damp, and receive little or no direct sunlight (walls with a northerly exposure and the underside of eaves are particularly vulnerable). In addition, horizontal surfaces such as decks may become catch-alls for airborne mildew spores. Decks are also sus-



Before

After

ceptible to collect water and the pollen, dirt, tree sap, mulch, fertilizer etc. that mildew uses as food sources.

To test for mildew, apply a few drops of fresh household bleach to the discolored area; if the area lightens, the discoloration is probably mildew. If it does not lighten, the discoloration is likely dirt or another contaminant, or the mildew is under the coating.

Mildew removal

- Clean surface: Prior to coating, clean the wood with a solution of one part household bleach to three parts water and a small amount of non-ammoniated, low-sudsing detergent (not more than 1/3 cup detergent in a gallon of solution).

- Scrub thoroughly with a brush or power washer for large areas.

- Condition and protect surface: Make sure to rinse all surfaces thoroughly with clean water to ensure all chemicals, dirt and mildew are washed away. Allow the surfaces to dry thoroughly.

- If mildew was present on the original surface or in previous coats, and a new finish coat is applied, the mildew will grow through the coating. At this point all coatings must be removed down to the original substrate and then cleaned as described above before a new coat is applied. To do this, use an appropriate finish remover to cut through the existing coatings.

- Always follow bleaching solutions and finish removers with a wood cleaner designed to brighten, condition and enhance the wood's appearance.

To help protect your wood against further weathering and fungal problems, select only top quality paints, stains and finishes that contain a mildewcide and ultraviolet protection.

Long-term mildew prevention

The best way to minimize mildew long-term is to keep your deck/siding clean. To help reduce your mildew problem, follow these tips.

- Direct water away from structures by maintaining roofs, rain gutters and grading, which will control dampness.

- Improve air circulation by cutting back trees and shrubs to several feet away from structures.

- Eliminate water contact with wood structures and minimize waste by repairing and adjusting sprinklers to control the amount and direction of water flow.

- Control excess moisture year-round by installing moisture vapor barriers under decks and other structures, and in walls where required. For interiors, install attic ventilation, bathroom and kitchen exhaust fans.

When using chemical products or machinery like power washers, always follow manufacturers' directions, use appropriate eye, skin and apparel protection, and protect pets and plants from all solutions.

So remember, by cleaning and recoating as necessary, you will avoid costly repairs, protecting your real estate investment for years to come.

For more information about deck and siding cleaners, paints, stains and finishes, visit a local home center like The Home Depot.