

The teak deck effect

If you love the look and feel of a teak-laid deck, but also want to save the rainforests, is 'plastic' teak the answer? Jake Kavanagh and Peter Firstbrook discover the ease of a DIY fit-out in part two of our non-slip decking series

Wooden decks look impressive, but teak is expensive and requires great skill to put down correctly. However, with the invention of artificial teak, all this has changed. The decks still look just as good, but the 'teak' itself can be cut and shaped with a craft knife. The colour is almost perfect – it even has a grain to it – and there are little fibres coming out of the planks that give it a freshly scrubbed effect.

Traditionalists are still a bit wary of plastic wood, as some of the early formulations lost their colour and quickly became brittle in the sun. But new formulations, new colours and some powerful UV stabilisers have revolutionised the product.

Flexible teaks will conform easily to the sweep of your deck, and being UV stabilised, they won't weather to grey if left unattended. You won't need special teak cleaners or preservatives – just the occasional bucket of soapy water and a soft scrubbing brush – and it won't grow fungus, or split and crack in the sun. You can sand it into shape with 40-grit sandpaper and – perhaps the real bonus for working decks – it retains excellent non-slip characteristics, especially in the wet.

Too good to be true?

Well, almost. It comes at a price, and this is about the only thing it has in common with its real-life



▲ Artificial teak is UV stable, as proved by the 10-year-old Tek-Dek on this yacht in the south of France

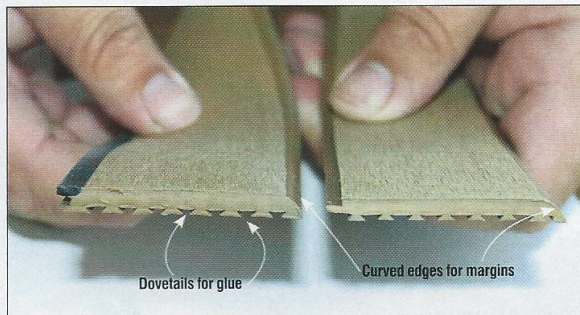
counterpart. Include the price of the glue, and 10% wastage at the fitting stage, and artificial teak costs about the same as 6mm teak – around £140 a square metre. A typical 2.5m strip (50mm wide with caulking) will cost around £10, although it gets cheaper by the roll. At 10m, the price is around £45, and a 290ml glue cartridge comes in at about £9. There isn't much difference in weight, either. So, while not cheap, it's easy to use and very effective,

The types

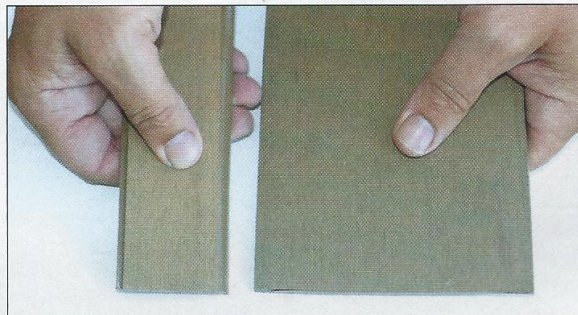
This new generation of artificial teak has been around long enough to convince the sceptics that it works. A 10-year test on a yacht in the south of France shows that the UV stabilisers really do preserve the natural wood colour. There is no fading, and if anything it will darken slightly with age. Early problems with lifting planks have been cured by redesigning the profile of the extrusions, as well as reformulating the adhesive.

First into the market was Flexi-teak, which is supplied by Advanced Marine Decking and its success was followed by Tek-Dek from the Tek Group and Dek-King from Wilks Rubber. There are a few other teak-like materials available, but these three really dominate the market.

Most of the manufacturers supply their product as strips of 2.25m, or in rolls of either 10m or 20m for bigger jobs. There are also several widths, although the most usual is



▲ These Tek-Dek extrusions have a dovetail underside so the glue forms a mechanical, as well as a chemical bond. These two are margin boards for edging



▲ Extrusions come in many shapes and sizes, the most usual being 50mm to match 'real' teak decks. Extra wide 'king planks' (right) are available for decorative work

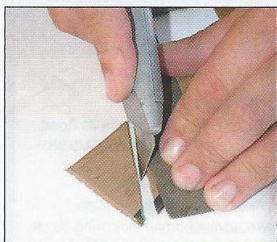
50mm to match a 'genuine' teak-laid deck.

Many of the extrusions have built-in seams of black, and the strips are designed to be stuck together with the simplicity of tongue and groove. This allows quite large panels to be made up from templates before being transferred to the boat.



▲ Large areas of decking can be created from templates in the comfort of your home – great for rainy days

The DIY boatbuilder will find it remarkably easy to use. It slices with a Stanley knife and glues down without drilling holes, which might otherwise compromise the watertight integrity of the deck. The planks will also conform to surfaces that are not completely flat (although undulations will detract from the natural effect – after all, real teak doesn't easily follow contours). Warming the planks with a hot air gun increases their flexibility (you can pop them into a very low oven for a few minutes if



▲ The PVC extrusion is as easy to cut as a thick vinyl kitchen tile

working from home) but beware of stretching the material when warm.

Good preparation is needed for a strong glue bond, but once it's down, the deck should need no further attention. If the surface becomes marked, it can simply be sanded to expose fresh colour. More serious damage can be cut out and a new section dropped in – and of course there will be no problems with a colour match.

We'll be covering the more complex deck projects next month, but here we start with the making of some simple 'teak' deck pads for a small boat.

MAKING DEK-KING PADS

Peter Firstbrook wanted to rejuvenate his seven-year-old motorboat with a non-slip deck, so he investigated fitting Wilks Dek-King. The DIY job took him three days, and he is delighted with the results.

TOOLS REQUIRED

Some specialist tools are required, and on a big deck they will be a useful investment. However, for a smaller project you may want to hire the necessary specialist kit (sausage glue guns, 90° cutters, etc)

YOU WILL NEED:

- ✓ Cartridge/sausage gun glue dispenser
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Stelmax glue (for linking planks to each other)
- ✓ 90/45° cutters
- ✓ Extendable roller
- ✓ Tape measure
- ✓ Disposable gloves
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Craft knife
- ✓ Craft blades
- ✓ A 5mm chisel for gouging new rebates. Individual 5mm

chisels are not always easy to find in DIY outlets, but there seems to be a glut of 6mm ones. Use an angle grinder to cut a cheap 6mm chisel back by 1mm.



'We recently bought a 1998 Fletcher Malibu to use for coastal fishing and watersports. The brand new Honda 90hp outboard was excellent, but the boat itself was looking tired, so a little winter TLC was required. Filling in chips and polishing the gel coat was straightforward, but I also wanted to cover areas of surface GRP crazing.

I had previously seen artificial

teak decking at the boat shows, and noticed how the product has improved over the years, so I decided to use the decking on both my foredeck and aft deck, to give a good non-slip surface and to cover up the GRP.

'Like many motorboats produced in the 1990s, the Malibu has large areas of bare white deck, so the teak would also freshen up what was otherwise a very white boat.

'I decided to make three sections: one large panel of Dek-King to cover the foredeck, and two smaller panels to go on the aft deck. I wanted the foredeck to have planks that followed the curvature of the deck edge while cutting into the king plank in the traditional manner. I decided to start with the aft deck panels, as they were smaller and more straightforward to make.'

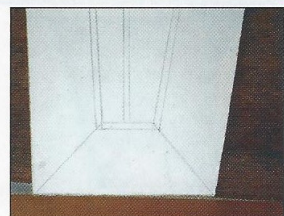
CREATING A TEMPLATE



1 Using strong brown paper, make a template of the pad, marking clearly its orientation. Tack the paper down with masking tape as you cut it for increased accuracy.



2 Transfer your template to a piece of 3mm white-coated hardboard, and using a ruler mark out the edges in pencil. Keep the template handy as it will be needed to aid trimming later.



3 You will be able to pre-plan the various cuts and shapes by drawing on the white surface, and any mistakes can be rubbed out and re-worked until you are happy with the design.

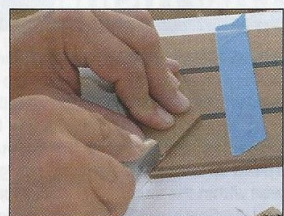
MAKING THE PAD



4 Slightly overcut the strips of margin board to create the outside edges, and use standard extrusion for any inside planks. Apply the Stelmax glue and snap together

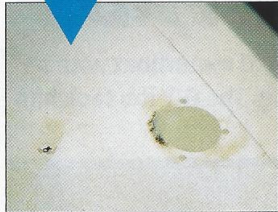


5 The strips are held tightly with masking tape as the glue dries, (which only takes a few minutes) and the template is used again as a guide to trimming the ends.



6 Using a small piece of margin board and a ruler, cut out the shape of the infill piece. Now use simple marquetry to cut through into the pad beneath so it will drop in. ▶

DECK PREPARATION



1 Any fittings that fall within the new deck area were removed and filled with epoxy to create a smooth surface. They can be reattached later (as in this deck gland).



2 The completed pad is positioned on deck, and marked around with a hard pencil for a faint line. If the templating was successful, it should be a perfect fit!



3 The area inside the pencil marks is then abraded with a coarse sandpaper. If the deck has already been painted, ideally you need to cut through the paint to the substrate.

STICKING DOWN



1 Carefully mask to the outside of the pencil mark, and then liberally apply the glue. Small areas can be covered with a cartridge but big areas will need a sausage gun.



2 Using a notched dispenser, spread the glue evenly within the area, making sure there is good coverage at the edges. The masking tape will catch any overspill.



3 Apply the pad and roller it down. Use weights (water bottles or canned drinks) for compression – especially at the edges. Once dry, trim the tape and peel it away.

MAKING A SEAM



1 Making seams in artificial teak is much the same as with the real thing – except easier. Make the cuts, and use the 5mm chisel to gouge out the gap. Then carefully mask off.



2 Now spread on the glue (the same stuff that you used to stick the pad down with) Make sure it is pushed well in to the gap, and scrape off any excess.



3 Once the glue has dried (ideally 24 hours) the tape can be removed. If it is a little proud, it can be sanded back or trimmed carefully with a sharp chisel.

CONCLUSION

Dek-King is certainly both easier and quicker to lay than real teak. Even so, the foredeck panel and two smaller aft deck panels still took Peter more than three days to make and fit. This was longer than he expected, but he found you do speed up with practice. It is a straightforward job, well within the capability of practical boat owners, and the final result looks very professional.

In total, it took a whole day to make the two small aft deck panels: one hour for cutting the template, two hours to make each of the panels, and then another hour for gluing the panels in position on the prepared deck.



TOP TIPS

■ Problems arise with panels where you don't have a slot for the tongue and groove, such as at the top and bottom of the inner panel, or where the boards are cut at an angle. The only solution here is to edge-glue with Stelmex and allow the glue to set using duct tape to hold the panel over and re-glue from underneath. It's a bit fiddly, but not too complicated.

■ Wilks' caulking compound, like Sikaflex, has a working temperature of 15-25°C, so this is not really a winter project. If you try to work in temperatures below 15°C, the compound becomes too stiff to handle. I was working at around 15°C and I found that by leaving the tube of adhesive on a radiator, it was much easier to spread. Wilks now claim that their new, modified adhesive is usable between 5°C and 35°C.

■ It is essential to wear disposable gloves when using this adhesive, and to replace them every time you get even a trace of black adhesive on them. If you don't, the compound will get smeared over everything.

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NEXT MONTH:

Peter tackles a more complex foredeck panel, and we look at large deck and cockpit areas using Tek-Dek with tips from professional installers. We'll also be exploring the uses of 'rigid' decorative mock-teak, which has some interesting applications.