

## Good choices make good decks

(ARA) - They're comfortable. They can be a private sanctuary or party central. They're as close to home as you can get. And they often return as much money as it costs to build them.

They are decks: a practical and enjoyable investment for nearly any residence. It's no wonder they are so popular, now part of more than 25 percent of all homes in the United States, with a much higher percentage in suburban neighborhoods.

The enjoyment value of a deck, and certainly the financial value when a home is resold, depends largely on the attractiveness of the deck. In turn, the appearance depends on the materials chosen, the workmanship during construction and the deck's maintenance.

### Deck materials

There are more decking choices now than ever, including mahogany, composites and plastics. However, the overwhelmingly preferred choice, based on longevity, ease of installation, availability, natural appearance and economy, remains pressure-treated wood. Even here there are choices, including a new wood that is receiving excellent reviews from early users.

Traditional treated wood, such as Wolmanized wood and Outdoor wood, has been used extensively since the mid 1970s. It resists damage from termites and decay, and

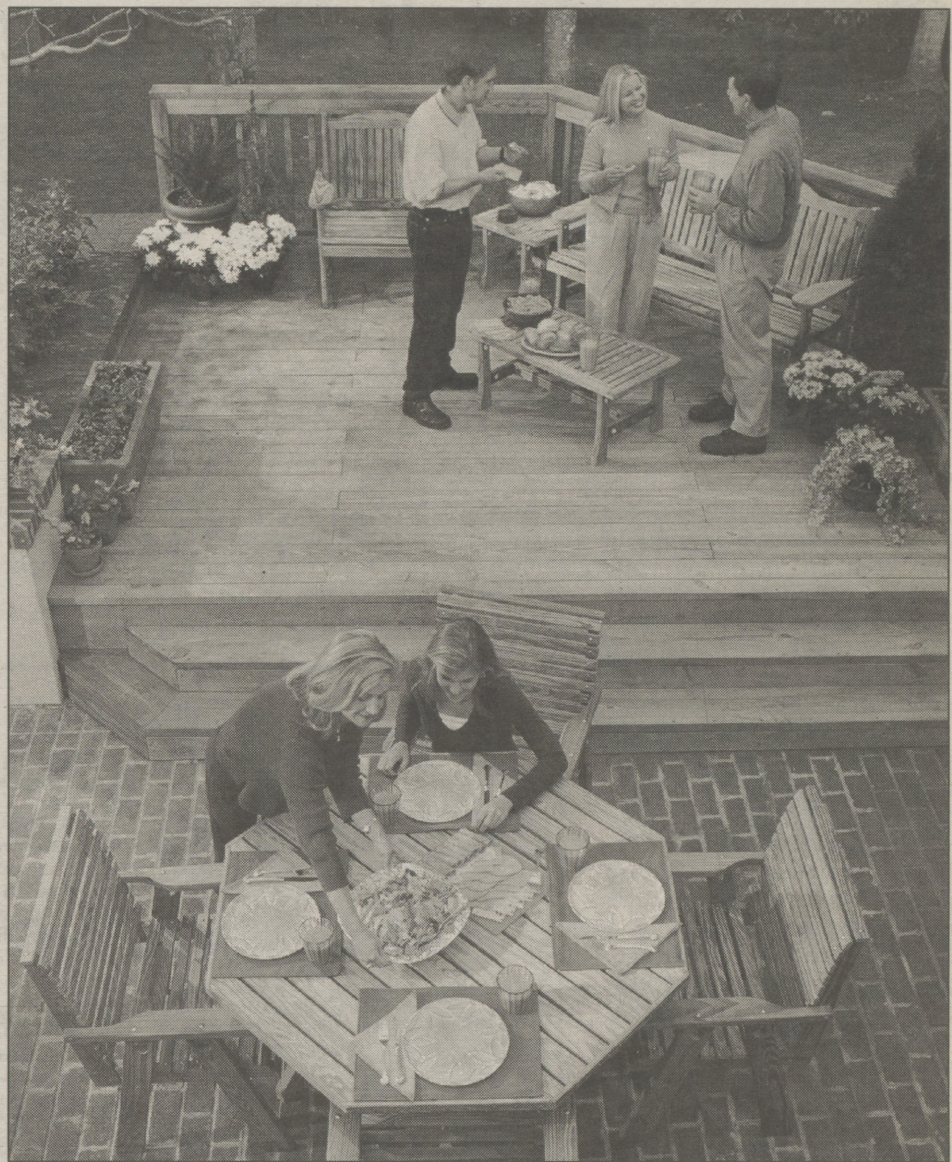
many manufacturers offer a warranty that extends for the lifetime of the purchaser in residential and agricultural applications.

A new type of preserved wood, recently introduced in the United States, has similar longevity but uses a different preservative solution. Natural Select wood is protected by a copper-based preservative with an organic fungicide, and also carries a lifetime limited warranty. Though new to the United States, wood treated with this preservative has been used for nearly a decade in Europe. Natural Select wood is an ideal choice where regulations or environmental concerns create the desire for an alternative to traditional treated wood.

Regardless of the wood chosen, homeowners should be aware of differences in lumber grades. Preservatives make wood last longer, whether that wood is lower-grade material with knots and missing corners, or higher-grade material with few blemishes. Make sure you get the grade of lumber you want. The grade is marked on the wood, and usually noted on the store's price signs.

Consider the more expensive, higher grades for visible parts of the deck, and use lower cost, lower grade lumber where beauty is not critical.

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Nothing beats a well-designed deck for casual summer gatherings.

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