



Majestic Outdoors Announces Drought Guidance for Deck Groundwork

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Majestic Outdoors has published guidance for homeowners on how prolonged drought affects ground preparation for decks and patios, following the classification of Durham and Orange counties in the most severe category tracked by the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality introduced the exceptional drought designation for parts of the state in April 2026, and it has since extended across much of the Piedmont. State reporting places the year among the driest since federal record keeping began in 1895.

The North Carolina Geological Survey documents that clay soils shrink as moisture leaves them and swell as moisture returns, a cycle it attributes to seasonal and drought-driven changes in soil moisture content. Piedmont soils are predominantly clay-based, which makes the region more responsive to that cycle than the sandier soils found in the Coastal Plain.

That behavior has consequences for anything built on the ground during an extended dry period. Soil that has contracted through months of moisture deficit will expand again when normal rainfall returns. Structures set into ground at its driest point may sit differently once the surrounding soil regains volume.

"The ground we are working in this summer is not the ground that will be there in six months," said Jay Beswick, owner of Majestic Outdoors. "Reading the site as it is on the day of construction is only half of the job. The other half is anticipating what the soil does when the drought ends."

Site evaluation and structural preparation are separate stages in the company's project process, carried out before construction begins. Each stage assesses conditions at the specific property rather than applying a uniform approach across every site in the region.

The company notes that site-specific decisions about footings and base preparation should be made in accordance with applicable building codes, and, where conditions warrant, with input from a licensed engineer. Majestic Outdoors handles permit acquisition and inspection scheduling as part of its process, which places those decisions on record with the reviewing authority before work proceeds.

Drainage planning is affected by the same conditions. Research from North Carolina State University's Stormwater Engineering Group has found that infiltration rates vary substantially with soil type, and that findings developed on sandy subgrade do not transfer directly to clay. Hardened clay accepts water more slowly than the same soil at normal moisture levels, which affects how a property handles the first significant rainfall after an extended dry period.

For elevated structures, that raises the question of where roof and deck runoff is directed once it leaves the surface. Under-deck drainage systems capture water above the framing and route it away from the area below, which keeps the space beneath an elevated deck usable and moves water to a chosen discharge point rather than allowing it to collect against footings.

Paver installations depend on a prepared aggregate base rather than on the native soil alone. Majestic Outdoors builds patios using Belgard pavers set on a prepared base, an approach that separates the finished surface from direct contact with subgrade that may change volume as moisture conditions shift through the year.

"Homeowners tend to think about drought as something that affects the lawn," Beswick said. "It affects what is underneath the lawn just as much, and that is where a deck or a patio actually rests. The conversation that matters happens before anything is built, not after the ground has already moved."

Material selection is a separate consideration from groundwork. The company builds with aluminum and

pressure-treated framing and installs composite and PVC decking, including TimberTech and TimberTech by AZEK products, along with railing and lighting components. Those choices are made in the design stage, which at Majestic Outdoors includes three-dimensional modeling so homeowners can review a layout before construction begins.

Timing also enters the discussion. Outdoor construction in the Triangle runs through much of the year, and projects planned during a dry stretch are designed and built under conditions that will not persist. Understanding how a site has been affected by the current drought allows for design decisions that account for present conditions as well as the rehydration that follows.

Majestic Outdoors recommends that property owners planning outdoor construction ask their builder how soil conditions at the site were assessed, how the design accounts for moisture returning to the ground, and what documentation will be submitted to the local permitting authority.

Majestic Outdoors designs and builds custom decks, porches, patios and outdoor living structures for homeowners across the Raleigh-Durham area, serving Durham, Wake, Orange and Chatham counties. The company has received multiple National Deck and Railing Association awards, including first place in the Framing category and first place in Alternative Decks in the 2025 competition, and first place in Alternative Decks in the 2024 competition.

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