

Deck It Outlines Footing Considerations as Dry Conditions Persist

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Deck It, a Massachusetts deck builder specializing in composite and PVC construction, has outlined how a third consecutive year of drought is affecting site assessment and footing installation on residential deck projects. The company said ground conditions encountered during excavation this season have differed from what crews typically find in the region, prompting closer review at the earliest stage of construction.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs declared Level 3 Critical Drought conditions in the Central and Northeast Regions in March 2026, citing limited groundwater recharge over the winter. According to NOAA data cited by state officials, April 2026 was the driest April statewide since 2010, with rainfall ranging from 1.5 to 3 inches against a typical 4.12 inches. U.S. Drought Monitor data showed approximately 67 percent of Massachusetts under active drought conditions in late July. State drought declarations note that the current drought began in 2024 and has produced declining groundwater across nearly all regions.

For deck construction, the effect appears during the earliest phase of a project rather than in the finished structure. Ground that has been dry for an extended period excavates differently than moist soil, and the water table encountered at footing depth may sit lower than in previous seasons. Both are conditions a crew evaluates on site rather than from a plan drawn in advance.

"When the ground has been dry this long, what we hit at footing depth is not always what the property looked like the last time we worked in that neighborhood," said Patrick Byrne, co-founder of Deck It. "We are checking conditions as we dig rather than assuming, because the same lot can behave differently in a third drought year than it did in a normal one."

Footing depth itself does not change with rainfall. Deck footings in Massachusetts are set below the depth at which soil freezes, a figure driven by winter conditions rather than by summer moisture levels. What extended

dry weather affects is the excavation itself, the condition of the surrounding soil, and how the site behaves once moisture returns.

Soil survey data published by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service classifies much of eastern and central Massachusetts as glacial till and sandy loam, materials that carry low shrink-swell potential compared with the expansive clay soils found in other parts of the country. That distinction matters because construction guidance written for clay-heavy regions does not transfer directly to New England conditions. The more relevant local factors are groundwater level, the presence of fill or organic material, and how a particular parcel drains.

Properties with fill, buried organic matter, or previously disturbed ground are more likely to show movement following an extended dry period than properties sitting on undisturbed native soil. Older lots that have been graded, landscaped, or built over multiple times can present conditions that differ substantially from a neighboring property.

"Most of what determines whether a deck stays level over twenty years happens before anyone sees a board," said Jake Zbikowski, co-founder of Deck It. "The footings get buried and forgotten, and they are the one part of a deck that is close to impossible to correct once everything above them exists."

Deck It said site conditions are reviewed during the design phase, before framing begins, alongside deck layout, framing plan and permitting. The company produces a three-dimensional design during that stage, allowing a proposed layout to be reviewed against the actual property before materials are ordered. Permitting is handled by the company on the projects it builds.

Sloped properties introduce a further consideration. On ground that falls away from the house, posts vary in height across the structure and footings carry differing loads, which makes site assessment more consequential than on level ground. Multi-level designs are one response to that condition, allowing a deck to follow existing grade rather than sit on a single elevated platform.

Conditions are also expected to remain relevant into the following seasons. UMass Extension has documented that drought impacts can be delayed until the next season or longer, meaning the effects of consecutive dry years are frequently observed after the drought itself has ended. Ground that has not recharged before winter can respond differently through freeze and thaw cycles than ground entering winter at normal moisture levels.

Deck It said the current conditions do not change the fundamentals of how a deck is built, but they do reinforce the value of assessing each property individually rather than applying a standard approach across a region.

Founded in 2017 and focused exclusively on decking since 2021, Deck It designs and builds custom decks, porches and sunrooms for residential and commercial properties across Central Massachusetts and the MetroWest region, operating from a showroom in Bolton. The company is a TimberTech Platinum Pro and Trex Pro Platinum contractor and a member of the North American Deck and Railing Association. In 2025 the company was named Top Contractor of the Northeast by TimberTech, an award recognizing the volume of TimberTech products installed.

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Deck It

Deck It is a Bolton, MA based, family-owned custom deck builder serving Central Massachusetts. Founded in 2017 by Jake and Pat, our team has focused exclusively on decking since 2021

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