



J&A Deck & Fence Details Drainage Effects of a Drought-to-Storm Shift

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J&A Deck & Fence is drawing attention to a seasonal transition that affects how water moves around decks and fences, as forecasters point to a wetter pattern arriving on ground that has spent much of the summer dry.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, roughly 71 percent of Maryland was under active drought as of mid-July 2026, with portions of the state in severe and extreme categories. National Weather Service records place this summer among the five warmest starts in 155 years of Washington-area observations, with rainfall running below average across the period. Forecasters have since pointed to a strengthening El Nino bringing higher humidity and more frequent thunderstorm activity to the Mid-Atlantic through late summer.

The combination is what matters rather than either condition alone. Soils across Montgomery County belong to the Piedmont group and are largely clay, formed from weathered igneous and metamorphic rock. Clay hardens and cracks as it dries, and hardened clay does not absorb a sudden downpour the way the same

soil would at normal moisture content. Water that would ordinarily soak in instead runs across the surface or channels directly into open cracks, reaching deeper soil than it typically would during steady seasonal rainfall.

"The first real storms after a dry spell behave differently than people expect," said Josh Arrington, Owner of J&A Deck & Fence. "The same two inches of rain that disappears into the ground in April will sit on the surface in August. Homeowners see standing water where they have never seen it before and assume something changed with the deck. Usually what changed is the ground."

That distinction matters because standing water near posts and at grade is a different condition than water shedding cleanly off a deck surface. Water pooling around the base of a post, or collecting beneath a structure where it previously drained away, keeps the surrounding soil saturated for longer stretches than it would be under a normal rainfall pattern. Soil that stays saturated behaves differently under load than soil that drains within hours.

Where a deck meets the house is the location that warrants particular attention during a wet stretch. Flashing at that connection directs water away from the structure rather than into the framing behind it, and the connection is examined during inspection for that reason. Runoff arriving in concentrated volume, rather than spread evenly across a longer rainfall, tests that detail more than steady spring rain does.

Arrington noted that the response varies considerably from property to property. Grading, downspout placement and discharge distance, tree cover, natural drainage paths across the lot, and the way the structure was originally built all determine where water travels once it reaches the ground. Two decks on the same street, built in the same year, can behave differently under identical rainfall.

"There is no general answer that applies to every yard," Arrington said. "What we look at is where the water actually goes on that specific property, and whether anything has already started moving."

The cycle also tends to repeat rather than resolve on its own. Once cracks open in dry clay and admit water at depth, the soil swells, then contracts again during the next dry stretch. That repeated shrink and swell is the mechanism behind gradual movement around footings and posts, as opposed to a single failure event. Movement of this kind usually appears cumulatively over several seasons rather than after any one storm.

Deck footings across the region are set below roughly 30 inches, the frost depth commonly applied in Maryland, so they bear on soil that stays comparatively stable through seasonal swings. Fence posts sit closer to the active surface layer, which is a substantial part of why fence lines often show visible movement before decks do.

Observations worth noting during the transition include water standing beneath a deck longer than it once did,

soil washing away or channeling around posts, new drainage paths forming across a yard, sections of decking staying damp well after a storm has passed, or a fence line that has shifted noticeably since spring. None of these confirms a structural problem on its own. Each indicates that water is moving differently than it did earlier in the year, which is useful information heading into fall and the freeze and thaw cycles that follow it.

The same considerations apply to projects still in the planning stage. Site grading, footing depth, post-setting method, board spacing and the way water is directed away from a structure are decisions made before construction begins, and they largely determine how a deck or fence handles seasonal extremes across the decades that follow. Structures built without attention to drainage tend to reveal the shortfall gradually, through accumulated small movements rather than an obvious single failure.

Founded in 2020 and based in Germantown, Maryland, J&A Deck & Fence designs, builds and repairs decks, fences, patios, porches and outdoor living spaces for residential and commercial property owners across Montgomery County. Owner Josh Arrington has worked in the trade for 12 years.

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For more information about J&A Deck And Fence, contact the company here: J&A Deck And Fence Joshua Arrington +13013888811 joshua@j-ahomeimprovement.com 13416 Country Ridge Dr, Germantown, MD 20874, United States

J&A Deck And Fence

J&A Deck & Fence is a Germantown, MD deck builder serving Montgomery County and the Washington Metro Area. Founded by Josh Arrington with over 10 years of Central Maryland experience

Website: <https://j-ahomeimprovement.com/>

Email: joshua@j-ahomeimprovement.com

Phone: +13013888811

