

Valer Deck & Patio Issues Fall Guidance on Outdoor Surface Residue

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Valer Deck & Patio has published seasonal guidance for homeowners on identifying and cleaning insect residue from decks, patios and fences ahead of fall, citing published information from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Virginia Cooperative Extension on spotted lanternfly activity in the region.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services repealed the state's spotted lanternfly quarantine effective March 27, 2025. In announcing the repeal, the agency reported that sixty-seven Virginia cities and counties had reproducing and persistent populations of the insect as of that date. The agency no longer requires reports of the pest from Fairfax County and Fairfax City, among a number of other jurisdictions where the insect is now established.

The regulatory change did not remove the maintenance issue the insect creates for outdoor structures. As spotted lanternflies feed, they excrete a sugary substance called honeydew that falls onto surfaces below and

supports the growth of sooty mold. Fairfax Master Gardeners, part of Virginia Cooperative Extension, report that residents find honeydew difficult to clean from objects, and that the substance attracts other insects including ants and wasps. For homeowners, that combination is often the first indication that something is happening in the trees overhead.

"A homeowner sees black staining on a deck and assumes the boards are failing," said Daniel Stendeback, President of Valer Builders LLC. "In a lot of cases it is residue sitting on top of a perfectly sound surface. That is a cleaning question, not a construction question, and the two get confused constantly."

The guidance walks through how different surfaces respond to the same residue. Valer Deck & Patio builds in composite, PVC and pressure-treated wood decking, and the document notes that residue behaves differently on each, with surface texture and finish affecting how readily it lifts. It also addresses patio surfaces in concrete, pavers and natural stone, where joints and porosity introduce considerations that do not apply to a deck board, and fencing in wood, vinyl, composite and aluminum, where the vertical orientation changes how residue collects and where it concentrates.

The document is direct about what falls outside its scope. It notes that visible staining on a structure is a surface condition and should not be interpreted as evidence of a structural problem, and that the two require different assessments by different people. It also states that questions about treating trees or landscape plants belong with a licensed arborist or pest management professional rather than with a construction contractor, and points readers to state and extension resources for that guidance.

Timing forms the other half of the document. Extension sources describe spotted lanternfly egg masses appearing from September through April on flat surfaces, including outdoor furniture and fencing, which places the current period immediately ahead of the egg-laying window. The guidance notes that surfaces addressed before the end of the season are generally easier to work with than the same surfaces left through winter, when residue has had months to set and weather has limited what can reasonably be done outdoors.

"The end of August is when people stop thinking about the deck and start thinking about the holidays," Stendeback said. "It is also the point where an hour of attention saves a much longer job in the spring."

The guidance advises homeowners to consult manufacturer cleaning instructions for their specific decking product before applying any cleaning method. It notes that composite and PVC products carry their own published care requirements, that those requirements vary between product lines from the same manufacturer, and that a treatment suitable for one surface is not automatically suitable for another. The document also raises the practical point that pressure washing, a common first instinct, is addressed differently by different manufacturers and that checking first is faster than repairing afterward.

For homeowners uncertain whether what they are seeing is residue or a material issue, the guidance describes what can reasonably be determined from a visual review and where that review reaches its limits. It notes that a structure showing staining in the same places each season is telling a different story than one where the appearance has changed, and that the distinction is worth establishing before deciding on any course of action.

Valer Deck & Patio developed the guidance after noting that the subject is thoroughly documented by agricultural and extension sources in the context of trees, crops and landscape plants, but is rarely addressed in terms of what the residue means for the outdoor structures sitting beneath them. The company states that the document is intended as a starting point rather than a substitute for manufacturer instructions or professional assessment.

The guidance is available on the company website.

Valer Deck & Patio is the operating name of Valer Builders LLC, a Virginia Class A licensed contractor founded in 2022. The company designs and builds custom decks, patios, porches, pergolas, gazebos and fences for homeowners across Northern Virginia, and is led by owner Daniel Stendeback.

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Valer Deck and Patio

Valer Deck & Patio is a custom deck and outdoor living builder serving Fairfax, VA and Northern Virginia. Led by owner Dan Stendeback, who brings 25+ years of Experience

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