Go To Guy Home Services Details Soil Moisture Effects on Deck Framing

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ATLANTA, GA - September 08, 2026 -
Go To Guy Home Services has released guidance on how the swing between drought and heavy rainfall affects residential deck framing, following a year in which the Southeast moved from record-dry conditions into an above-normal precipitation pattern.

The region entered 2026 in an extended dry period, with drought coverage across the lower forty-eight expanding through the spring months. Conditions then reversed. National Weather Service long-range models indicated above-average precipitation across Georgia in June, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center issued an El Niño advisory on June 11, a pattern historically associated with wetter conditions across the southern tier of states.

That reversal matters more below ground than above it. Soil across the Georgia Piedmont is predominantly red clay derived from the weathering of underlying metamorphic and igneous rock, and the United States Geological Survey classifies soils of this type as having moderate to high shrink-swell potential. Clay in this category absorbs water and increases in volume, then contracts as it dries and pulls away from whatever bears on it.

A deck sits on that ground. When clay swells it exerts upward pressure against footings, and when it contracts it can leave voids beneath them. Structures supported by shallow footings are the most exposed to this, because the upper layer of soil is where seasonal moisture change is most pronounced. Depth places a footing below the zone where the majority of that movement occurs.

The symptoms of that movement tend to surface well after it begins. Gaps opening between a deck and the house, a change in how a surface feels underfoot, or stairs that no longer meet a landing squarely can all originate below grade rather than in the visible structure. Homeowners frequently attribute these signs to the decking material when the cause lies in what the material is fastened to.

The point where a deck attaches to the house carries particular importance in this context. That junction transfers a substantial share of the structure's load into the building itself, and it is a standard point of inspection during construction for that reason. Movement at the footings works its way toward that connection over time rather than remaining isolated at the perimeter.

Water management around a structure influences how severe the cycle becomes. Grading that directs runoff toward a deck rather than away from it concentrates moisture at the footings and widens the range of movement the surrounding soil goes through across a year. Georgia averages roughly fifty inches of rainfall annually according to NOAA climate normals, which gives that grading a considerable volume of water to route one direction or the other.

Tree canopy adds a further variable across much of the metro area. Shaded ground dries more slowly after rain, which extends the period during which soil around a footing holds moisture. A shaded lot and an exposed lot receiving identical rainfall can follow noticeably different moisture cycles.

"The rain itself is not usually what causes the problem," said Kelly Crow, Owner of Go To Guy Home Services. "It is the swing. Ground that stays consistently wet or consistently dry is more predictable than ground that goes back and forth, and a year like this one goes back and forth."

Crow said site conditions are assessed before a design is finalized rather than after construction reveals an issue. "Two houses on the same street can sit on different ground. The soil survey data is public, and looking at it before anything gets dug is a great deal easier than dealing with what happens when nobody did."

Soil information for a specific property is available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey, a public tool that maps soil series and their engineering properties by location. The data includes shrink-swell ratings, drainage class and depth to restrictive layers, all of which bear on how a structure should be supported at a given site.

For homeowners with an existing deck, the practical step is inspecting the ground around and beneath the structure twice a year, watching for pooling water, erosion at post bases and visible settling near supports. Movement identified early is considerably easier to address than movement discovered after it has worked through the framing above.

Crow noted that the same reasoning applies regardless of what goes on top of the frame. "The surface material gets most of the attention because it is the part people see. What decides how long a deck lasts is usually the part nobody looks at."

Go To Guy Home Services is a member of the North American Deck and Railing Association and a NADRA Deck Safety Ambassador, and holds Deckorators Certified Pro status. Homeowners named the company a Nextdoor Neighborhood Favorite in 2021, 2023 and 2024.

The company designs and builds custom decks, railings, pergolas, porches and outdoor living spaces for homeowners across the metro area, and produces three-dimensional design renderings that allow clients to review a project before construction begins.

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Go To Guy Home Services

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