

# Chemicals fight fungus that rots wood

BY READER'S DIGEST BOOKS  
FOR AP SPECIAL FEATURES

Crumbling foundations. Mushy windowsills. Falling fence posts. For years, homeowners were doomed to replace rotted wood.

But the battle may finally be over. Some manufacturers now guarantee — not merely claim — that their pressure-treated wood products will withstand termites and decay for life.

The basic problem? Wood rots. The source of this destruction? Fungus. Not just one type of fungus, either. There's an entire army of fungus species that thrives on wood. They eat the wood and cause the fiber to dissolve.

But fungi cannot infest wood everywhere. They need air, water and a 50- to 90-degree temperature range to thrive. Otherwise, they lie dormant or die.

Wood for foundation and outdoor use is a prime candidate for rot when it gets wet and doesn't have a chance to dry out.

The idea of preserving wood with chemicals began with the natural defenses of rot-resistant wood, notably redwood and cedar. The darker colored heartwood of these trees contains chemicals toxic to most fungus species. The lighter colored sapwood, toward the outside of the tree, is no more resistant than other woods.

Currently, there are three types of chemicals commonly used for preserving wood: pentachlorophenol (called penta), creosote and chromated copper arsenate (CCA). All are applied commercially only and are not available to homeowners. Penta and creosote are used mainly in industrial applications. Most of the treated lumber a homeowner can buy is treated with CCA (or a similar chemical), which can be identified by the distinctively greenish color of the wood. CCA is dissolved in water and forced deep into the wood under pressure. It bonds with the wood fibers as the wood dries. After that, it won't

leach out and protects the wood indefinitely.

The quality of treated wood varies, depending on the species of tree and on how deeply the preservative penetrates. To be effective the preservative should penetrate at least 2 1/2 inches into the wood. If you cut through a 2-by-4, the greenish tint should show throughout, although it will become lighter toward the center. An AWWPA (American Wood Preservers Association) stamp or tag on the lumber is a sign of quality control. A lifetime guarantee tag is another good quality indicator.

Also, note that brushing on a preservative, or soaking or dipping a piece of wood in a preservative, is not as good as pressure treatment. With repeated wetting and drying, such surface-treated wood develops deep cracks, exposing untreated areas where fungus can grow.

Like any other wood, pressure-treated wood will warp, crack and swell from exposure to moisture. But once it's dry,

most treated wood can be stained, painted or treated with water repellent to protect it from the elements and keep it stable.

The preservatives in treated wood can be harmful and should be treated with respect. Don't use pressure-treated wood where human or animal food can be exposed to it, such as for countertops, cutting boards and pet dishes. Wash any parts of your skin that come in contact with pressure-treated wood.

Don't use it indoors or where there might be frequent skin contact with it unless it's sealed with at least two coats of polyurethane, epoxy or shellac. For more details, read the consumer information pamphlets available wherever treated wood is sold.

Also, wear a dust mask to avoid inhaling sawdust when cutting treated wood. Don't burn the sawdust or scrap pieces; chemicals in the smoke can be inhaled. Dispose of the scraps in your ordinary trash collection or bury it.

## Area antique store offers guide to treasures

Royal Oak's newest antique store, AAE Estates, features a large selection of treasures.

Among the items are fine vintage pottery including Rookwood and McCoy,

furniture dating from the 1850s to the 1950s, fine paintings and toys. Estate consultant Jeff Allmen offers personal service.

The store also offers guides and books

about antiques that can be bought or special ordered.

AAE Estates is at 628 E. 11 Mile, between Main and Campbell. Call (810) 684-2220.

Allmen, 18, started collecting Matchbox cars at age 6 months. His love of collectibles started when his parents carted him to antiques stores before he was old enough to walk.

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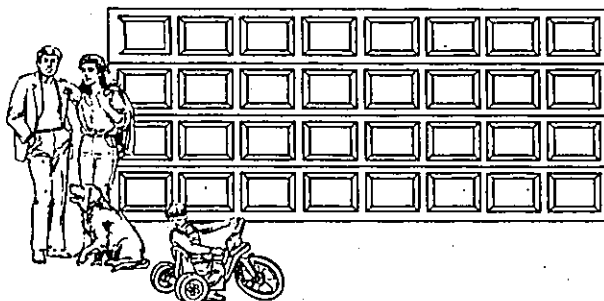
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