NEW BRUNSWICK DECKS

Winter & Seasonal Care

Questions about preparing decks for NB winters, snow removal, ice management, and seasonal transitions.

16 Expert Answers from Deck IQ

newbrunswickdecks.com/construction-brain

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Q1

What is the cost savings of proper deck winterization versus spring repair in NB?

Proper deck winterization in New Brunswick can save homeowners $1,500-$5,000 annually compared to spring repair costs. The math is compelling: spending $200-$500 on fall preparation prevents thousands in freeze-thaw damage, board replacement, and structural repairs that plague unprepared decks after our harsh Maritime winters.

The Financial Reality of NB's Freeze-Thaw Cycle

New Brunswick's 100+ annual freeze-thaw cycles are devastating to unprepared decks. Water penetrates wood grain, freezes, expands, and literally splits boards from within. A single winter can cause $2,000-$4,000 in damage to an unprotected pressure-treated deck, while composite and PVC decks suffer primarily from ice dam damage and railing stress. The most expensive repairs come from structural damage — when freeze-thaw cycles compromise joists, beams, or ledger connections, you're looking at $3,000-$8,000 in professional repairs.

Winterization Costs vs Spring Repair Costs

Fall winterization investment:

- Professional power washing and inspection: $200-$400
- Stain touch-ups (if needed): $100-$300
- Furniture storage/covering: $50-$150
- Drainage improvements: $100-$500
- **Total: $450-$1,350**

  Common spring repairs from poor winterization:

- Board replacement (10-15 boards): $800-$1,500
- Railing repairs from ice damage: $500-$1,200
- Joist repairs from moisture damage: $1,000-$3,000
- Ledger board issues from ice dams: $2,000-$5,000
- Complete deck refinishing: $1,200-$2,400
- **Total: $1,500-$8,000+**

The Compound Effect Over Time

A well-winterized pressure-treated deck lasts 15-20 years in New Brunswick, while neglected decks often need major repairs or replacement within 8-12 years. For a typical 200-square-foot deck, this means the difference between a $6,000 replacement every 10 years versus a $8,000 replacement every 18 years — plus avoiding annual repair costs of $1,000-$2,000.

Regional Considerations Across NB

Northern New Brunswick (Bathurst, Campbellton, Edmundston) sees the highest winterization savings due to deeper frost penetration (1.5m) and longer winter seasons. Southern regions (Moncton, Saint John, Fredericton) still benefit significantly, but ice dam damage from Maritime humidity cycles tends to be the bigger concern than pure freeze-thaw.

Beyond Direct Repair Savings

Proper winterization also prevents secondary damage that's often overlooked. Ice dams against house walls can cause interior water damage costing $5,000-$15,000. Structural deck failure can damage landscaping, windows, or siding. Insurance claims from deck-related damage average $8,000-$12,000 in New Brunswick, and many policies have exclusions for "maintenance-related" failures.

The Smart Investment Strategy

The most cost-effective approach combines annual light winterization ($200-$400) with professional deep maintenance every 3-4 years ($800-$1,200). This prevents the catastrophic failures that require complete reconstruction while maintaining your deck's appearance and safety. For composite and PVC decks, winterization focuses more on drainage and ice prevention, but the savings are still substantial — primarily avoiding railing damage and preventing ice-related structural stress.

Need help finding a deck builder for winterization services or spring repairs? New Brunswick Decks can match you with local professionals who understand our unique Maritime climate challenges and can provide proper seasonal maintenance to protect your investment.

Q2

What is the cost of heated deck mats to prevent ice buildup in New Brunswick?

Heated deck mats for ice prevention in New Brunswick typically cost $8-15 per square foot for the mats themselves, plus $200-500 for professional electrical installation. For an average 200 sq ft deck, you're looking at $2,100-3,500 total installed cost.

With New Brunswick's harsh freeze-thaw cycles and heavy snow loads (250-300cm annually), heated deck mats are becoming increasingly popular for safety and convenience. The mats use low-voltage heating elements to keep deck surfaces above freezing, preventing dangerous ice buildup that's common during our frequent winter thaw-freeze cycles.

Popular heated mat options include:

HeatTrak mats are the most common residential choice, running $10-12 per square foot. These interlocking rubber mats plug into standard outlets and automatically activate when temperatures drop below 38°F. They're designed to handle our heavy snow loads and can be stored during summer months.

Permanent radiant systems cost $12-18 per square foot for materials but require professional installation with dedicated electrical circuits. These systems are embedded under composite or stone deck surfaces and provide more even heating. However, they're typically only cost-effective during new deck construction.

Portable heated runners cost $8-10 per square foot and work well for stairs and high-traffic walkways. These are perfect for Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton homeowners who need spot protection rather than full-deck heating.

Operating costs in New Brunswick run approximately $0.50-1.50 per day during active heating periods (typically December through March). With NB Power's residential rates, expect $50-150 in additional electricity costs per winter season for an average deck.

Installation considerations are crucial in our climate. The electrical connection must be GFCI-protected and installed by a licensed electrician to meet NB electrical code. Many homeowners install a dedicated outdoor outlet with weather-resistant housing. The mats themselves are designed to handle our temperature swings from -35°C to spring thaw conditions.

Timing matters - order heated mats by October since demand spikes before winter. Many NB retailers stock them seasonally, and shipping delays are common once snow starts flying.

While heated mats solve ice problems effectively, they're a significant investment. Many homeowners find that strategic placement on stairs and main walking areas provides the safety benefits without heating the entire deck surface.

Need help finding an electrician for proper installation? The New Brunswick Construction Network can connect you with licensed electrical contractors familiar with outdoor heating system requirements.

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Q3

Should I remove planters from my deck before winter in Campbellton NB?

Yes, you should remove all planters from your deck before winter arrives in Campbellton. Leaving planters in place through a northern New Brunswick winter creates several problems that can shorten the life of your deck and damage the planters themselves.

Campbellton regularly sees winter temperatures dropping to -25C or colder, with seasonal snowfall averaging around 300 cm. When soil inside a planter freezes, the water in that soil expands with tremendous force. Ceramic and clay pots will crack or shatter outright, but even resin and composite planters can split along seams when subjected to repeated freeze-thaw cycles over a 5-month winter. The cost of replacing a set of quality planters every spring adds up quickly.

The more important concern is what planters do to your deck surface. A planter sitting in the same spot all winter traps moisture against the decking. Snow and ice melt collect underneath and around the planter base, and because airflow is blocked, that moisture never evaporates. On a pressure-treated wood deck, this constant moisture contact accelerates rot and creates dark discolouration stains that are extremely difficult to remove. On composite decking, trapped moisture promotes mould and mildew growth on the underside of the planter zone, which can leave permanent marks on lighter-coloured boards.

The weight factor matters too. A large planter filled with wet soil can weigh 50 to 100 pounds or more. Add the weight of accumulated snow and ice on top, and you are placing a concentrated load on a small area of your deck for months. This sustained point-loading can cause individual deck boards to warp or sag, and on older decks with softening joists, it contributes to structural deflection over time.

Before storing your planters for winter, empty the soil into a garden bed or storage bin. Clean the planters with a mild soap solution, let them dry completely, and store them in a garage, shed, or basement where they will not be exposed to freeze-thaw cycles. If you have built-in planters that cannot be moved, line them with rigid foam

insulation and ensure their drainage holes are completely clear so no water can pool and freeze inside the structure.

Once the planters are removed, sweep the deck surface underneath where they sat and inspect for any soft spots, discolouration, or early signs of mould. Treating those areas with an oxygen-based cleaner before the first hard freeze lets your deck go into winter in the best possible condition. When you place the planters back in spring, consider using pot feet or risers to elevate them about half an inch off the deck surface, which allows air circulation underneath and prevents the same moisture-trapping problem during the rainy months of May and June.

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Q4

How do I prevent my deck posts from heaving in Bathurst NB winters?

The only reliable prevention is setting your footings to a minimum depth of 1.2 to 1.5 metres — below the frost line in the Bathurst area — with a bell-shaped base that is wider at the bottom than the top, and using smooth-sided Sonotube forms that resist frost grip.

Bathurst sits on the Chaleur Bay coast in northern New Brunswick, where winter temperatures routinely reach minus 20 to minus 30 degrees Celsius and frost penetration is among the deepest in the province. The combination of heavy clay soils common in the Bathurst region and significant moisture from coastal proximity creates ideal conditions for frost heave. Water in the soil freezes from the surface downward, forming ice lenses that expand and push everything above them upward. A deck post sitting on a footing that does not extend below the frost line will move — it is not a question of if, but when and how much.

The bell-shaped footing base is critical and often overlooked by builders who simply pour concrete into a straight Sonotube. When the bottom of the footing is wider than the shaft above it, the surrounding soil below the frost line acts as an anchor. Frozen soil higher up may grip the tube and try to lift it, but the wider base resists being pulled through the narrower unfrozen soil below. This mechanical lock is what keeps the footing in place. Pouring the base slightly wider — flaring it out to roughly 18 to 24 inches diameter for a 10 or 12-inch tube — provides substantial heave resistance with minimal additional concrete.

Smooth-sided Sonotube forms reduce the friction between the frozen soil and the footing surface. When soil freezes against a rough or ribbed surface, it grips like a vise and transfers all of its upward force directly into the footing. A smooth cardboard tube allows some slippage — frozen soil can still grip, but the force transmitted is lower. Some experienced builders in the Bathurst area take this a step further by wrapping the upper 60 centimetres of the Sonotube in polyethylene sheeting before backfilling, creating an even slipperier surface that frost has difficulty gripping.

Backfill material matters significantly in Bathurst's clay-heavy soils. Clay retains moisture and generates substantial frost heave force when it freezes. Backfilling around the Sonotube with crushed gravel rather than the native clay soil you excavated reduces the amount of moisture-holding material in direct contact with the footing. Gravel drains freely, holds less water, and generates far less heave pressure than clay. Extend the gravel backfill at least 10 centimetres around the tube on all sides and up to grade level.

Drainage around footings is the final piece of the prevention strategy. Water that pools around a footing in fall saturates the surrounding soil and provides the moisture that drives frost heave. Grading the ground surface away from each footing location, ensuring gutters and downspouts are directed well away from the deck area, and maintaining positive drainage across the yard all reduce the moisture available to freeze around your footings.

For existing decks in Bathurst that are already experiencing heave, the repair unfortunately requires excavating the affected footings entirely and replacing them at proper depth. Shimming a heaved post, adding sister joists, or jacking the deck back to level without addressing the footing depth are all temporary measures that will fail again the following winter. Helical piles driven to 2 to 3 metres depth are an increasingly popular alternative to excavated footings in the Bathurst area, particularly for repairs where digging around an existing structure is difficult. They are installed mechanically, require no concrete, and bear on stable soil well below any frost activity.

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Q5

Can heavy snow loads collapse a deck in northern New Brunswick?

Yes, heavy snow accumulation can and does cause deck collapses in northern New Brunswick, particularly on undersized or aging structures that were not designed for the region's substantial snow loads.

Northern New Brunswick — communities like Edmundston, Campbellton, Bathurst, and the Acadian Peninsula — receives some of the highest annual snowfall totals east of the Rockies. Edmundston averages over 300 centimetres of snowfall per season, and individual storms can drop 30 to 50 centimetres in a 24-hour period. When that snow accumulates on a deck without being cleared, the weight adds up rapidly. Fresh fluffy snow weighs roughly 50 to 70 kilograms per cubic metre, but once it settles and compacts — or worse, absorbs rain and partially melts and refreezes — that weight can increase to 200 to 400 kilograms per cubic metre. A 3-metre by 4-metre deck with 60 centimetres of settled, wet snow on it can easily be carrying over 2,500 kilograms of additional load that the structure may not have been engineered to support.

The New Brunswick Building Code specifies ground snow loads that vary by region, and northern zones carry significantly higher requirements than southern communities like Saint John or Moncton. A deck designed to code

in the north will have larger joists, closer joist spacing, larger beams, and more substantial post and footing sizes than an identical-looking deck in the south. The problem is that many residential decks, particularly older ones built in the 1990s and early 2000s, were constructed without permits and without engineering, using standard dimensional lumber and spacing that would be adequate in milder climates but falls short in heavy snow territory.

The warning signs of an overloaded deck are visible if you know what to look for. Joists that are visibly sagging or bowing downward between beams indicate the lumber is being stressed beyond its capacity. Posts that are leaning or have shifted off their footing pads suggest the foundation is failing under load. Deck boards that have new gaps between them, or that feel springy and flexible underfoot, tell you the substructure is deflecting more than it should. Any of these signs in winter mean you should clear the snow immediately and have the structure assessed before using it.

The practical rule for northern New Brunswick homeowners is to shovel your deck whenever snow accumulation exceeds 30 centimetres. Do not wait for the end of a multi-day storm — clear it in stages. Use a plastic-edged shovel and push snow off the edges rather than piling it in the centre of the deck, which concentrates load on the weakest point of the span. Pay particular attention to areas where snow drifts against the house wall or piles up in corners, as these spots can accumulate two to three times the depth of open areas.

If you are building a new deck in Edmundston, Campbellton, or anywhere in the northern part of the province, ensure your builder is designing to the correct snow load zone. This typically means 2x10 or 2x12 joists at 12-inch centres rather than the 16-inch spacing common in southern builds, triple-ply beams rather than double-ply, and 6x6 posts rather than 4x4 for any height over 3 feet.

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Q6

When is the best time to do spring deck maintenance after a New Brunswick winter?

Wait until daytime temperatures are consistently above 10 degrees Celsius before doing any meaningful deck maintenance — in most of New Brunswick, that window opens reliably in mid to late May, though southern areas like Saint John and Moncton sometimes hit that mark by early May.

The temptation to get out and work on the deck during the first warm stretch in April is understandable after a long New Brunswick winter, but premature maintenance creates problems. Power washing when overnight temperatures still drop below freezing forces water deep into wood grain that then freezes and splits the fibres — the exact damage you are trying to prevent. Applying stain or sealer to wood that is still cold and damp from snowmelt results in poor adhesion and premature peeling. The 10-degree threshold is not arbitrary; it is the minimum temperature at which most deck stains and sealers cure properly, and it is the point at which wood has dried enough from winter moisture to accept a finish.

Spring maintenance should follow a specific sequence. Start with a thorough inspection before you clean anything. Walk the entire deck and look at every connection point. Check posts for plumb by holding a level against them — posts that are leaning even slightly may have been pushed by frost heave over the winter and need to be assessed for footing failure. Look at the ledger board connection where the deck meets the house, checking for new gaps, water staining, or loose lag bolts. Examine joist hangers and beam connections for corrosion, paying extra attention to any hardware that contacts pressure-treated lumber, as the copper in modern PT treatment accelerates corrosion on non-rated fasteners.

Look for the telltale signs of winter heave damage. Boards that have lifted at one end but not the other, posts that have shifted position, and railings that feel loose or wobbly all suggest that footings moved during the freeze-thaw season. Leaning posts are the most common and most obvious indicator. If you spot heave evidence, address the structural issue before spending time and money on cosmetic maintenance — there is no point staining a deck that needs its footings replaced.

Once the inspection is complete and any structural issues are addressed, power washing is the next step. Use a fan-tip nozzle at no more than 1,500 PSI for pressure-treated lumber and even lower for composite decking. Keep the nozzle at least 30 centimetres from the surface and work with the grain direction. The goal is to remove winter grime, mildew, and the grey oxidation layer — not to gouge the wood. A deck cleaning solution applied before power washing significantly improves the result and reduces the pressure needed.

After washing, let the deck dry for a minimum of 48 hours before applying any stain or sealer. In New Brunswick's spring humidity, 72 hours is safer. Check the moisture content with a meter if you have one — wood should be below 15 percent moisture before finishing. Apply a penetrating stain rather than a film-forming product, as

penetrating finishes perform dramatically better through New Brunswick's freeze-thaw winters because they allow moisture to move in and out of the wood rather than trapping it beneath a surface film.

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Q7

How do I winterize a deck-mounted hot tub in Moncton NB?

If you are shutting the hot tub down for winter, you need to fully drain it, blow out every line with a shop vacuum or air compressor, add plumbing antifreeze to the jets and pump, and secure a quality cover — or, alternatively, keep the tub running at a reduced temperature to prevent any freeze damage.

Moncton's winter temperatures regularly drop to minus 15 to minus 25 degrees Celsius, and the freeze-thaw cycling in southeastern New Brunswick is among the most frequent in the province due to the moderating influence of the Petitcodiac River and proximity to the coast. Water left anywhere in a hot tub's plumbing system will freeze, expand, and crack pipes, pump housings, or the shell itself. This is not a gradual risk — a single hard freeze below minus 10 can destroy a pump or split a PVC fitting overnight if there is residual water in the line.

The full winterization process starts with draining the tub completely. Open the drain valve and let gravity do the initial work, then use a submersible pump or wet vacuum to remove the last few centimetres of water that the drain cannot reach. This standing water in the footwell is where many homeowners make the mistake of assuming the tub is empty when it is not.

Next, blow out the plumbing lines. A shop vacuum set to blow mode, connected to each jet fitting with an adapter, forces air through the internal plumbing and pushes trapped water out through other jets and the drain. Work through every jet individually — hot tubs have multiple plumbing loops, and air blown through one jet does not necessarily clear water from a jet on a different circuit. An air compressor set to low pressure, around 30 to 40 PSI, also works well for this step.

After blowing the lines, pour non-toxic plumbing antifreeze — the pink RV and marine type, not automotive antifreeze — into each jet opening, the filter housing, and the pump intake. Use roughly 2 to 4 litres total distributed across all openings. This protects against any residual moisture that the air blowing did not fully remove.

Remove and store the filter cartridges indoors. Clean them first with a filter cleaning solution, let them dry completely, and store them somewhere that does not freeze. Filters left in the housing through winter trap water and become a breeding ground for bacteria that you will have to deal with in spring.

Secure the cover tightly. A properly fitted, insulated hot tub cover with locking straps is essential even on a drained tub. It keeps snow, rain, and debris out of the shell and prevents animals from nesting inside. Wind in Moncton can be significant, particularly during nor'easters, so locking clips or tie-down straps are not optional.

The alternative to full winterization is simply keeping the hot tub running through winter at a reduced temperature, typically around 30 to 32 degrees Celsius instead of the usual 38 to 40. The circulating water and active heater prevent any freezing, and many Moncton homeowners prefer this approach because they enjoy using the tub year-

round. The operating cost is real — expect $80 to $150 per month in electricity depending on your tub's insulation quality and how often you use it — but it eliminates the winterization and spring recommissioning process entirely, and it avoids the risk of incomplete draining that leads to freeze damage.

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Q8

What de-icing products are safe for Trex composite decking in New Brunswick?

Calcium chloride and calcium magnesium acetate are the only two de-icing products recommended for Trex composite decking — Trex themselves confirm this in their care guidelines, and it applies across all their product lines including Transcend, Enhance, and Select.

The distinction matters because most homeowners in New Brunswick default to whatever de-icer is cheapest and most available at their local hardware store, and in most cases that is rock salt — sodium chloride. Rock salt is not safe for Trex decking. It leaves a corrosive residue on the surface that can discolour the boards over time, and more importantly, it attacks the stainless steel or coated screws and hidden clip fasteners that hold the deck together. In New Brunswick's humid Maritime climate, where salt air is already present in coastal communities like Shediac, Miramichi, and Saint John, adding sodium chloride directly onto the deck accelerates fastener corrosion that is already a concern.

Sand is the other common product people reach for, and it should be avoided entirely on Trex. Sand particles are abrasive and will scratch the capped polymer surface that gives Trex its stain resistance and fade protection. Once that cap layer is scratched, the exposed core material is more susceptible to moisture absorption, staining, and mould growth. The scratches are permanent — unlike wood, you cannot sand down and refinish a composite board.

Calcium chloride is the practical everyday choice for New Brunswick homeowners. It is sold at every major hardware store in the province, works effectively down to approximately minus 25 degrees Celsius, and melts ice rapidly. For a typical residential deck, a light application scattered across icy patches is sufficient. You do not need to coat the entire surface heavily — the goal is to break the bond between ice and the deck board so you can then shovel the loosened ice off. After the ice is cleared, sweep up any remaining calcium chloride granules so they do not sit on the surface longer than necessary.

Calcium magnesium acetate, commonly abbreviated as CMA, is the premium option. It is a biodegradable compound that is less corrosive than any chloride-based product and is safe for the deck, surrounding vegetation, and waterways. CMA works best at temperatures down to about minus 7 degrees Celsius, so it is most effective during the milder freeze-thaw periods that are common in southern New Brunswick during November, March, and those mid-winter thaw stretches. For deep cold spells, calcium chloride is the better performer.

Beyond chemical de-icing, the best ice prevention on Trex is simply keeping snow cleared promptly. A plastic-edged snow shovel used after each snowfall prevents the compaction layer that turns into ice. Shovel with the grain direction of the boards, pushing snow off the deck edge rather than piling it in corners where it melts and refreezes. If you stay on top of snow removal through the winter, your need for any chemical de-icer drops dramatically, and your Trex deck will come through spring looking essentially the same as it did in the fall.

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Q9

How do I protect my deck from frost heave in Fredericton NB?

The only reliable protection against frost heave in Fredericton is ensuring every deck footing extends below the frost line, which means a minimum of 1.2 metres deep and ideally 1.5 metres in the Fredericton

area.

Frost heave happens when moisture in the soil freezes and expands, pushing everything above it upward. In Fredericton, where winter temperatures regularly drop below minus 20 degrees Celsius and the frost line penetrates 1.2 to 1.5 metres into the ground depending on soil conditions, any footing that does not reach below that depth is going to move. The movement is not always dramatic in a single season — a post might lift 5 or 10 millimetres in the first winter and you barely notice. But heave is cumulative and uneven, meaning one post lifts while another stays put, and over three or four winters you end up with a deck that slopes, boards that gap unevenly, and structural connections that are being pulled apart.

The signs of frost heave on an existing deck are straightforward to identify. Posts that are no longer plumb — leaning away from vertical even slightly — are the most common indicator. Boards that have lifted or separated at one end of the deck but not the other suggest differential heave, where footings at different locations are moving different amounts. Ledger board connections that show new gaps between the ledger and the house wall, or lag bolts that seem to be pulling, can also indicate that the outer posts have heaved and are levering the deck away from the foundation.

If your existing deck is experiencing frost heave, the fix requires excavating the affected footings and replacing them with properly sized, properly depth-set footings. The footing shape matters significantly. A bell-shaped bottom — wider at the base than at the top — resists being pushed upward by frozen soil because the surrounding earth effectively locks the wider base in place. A straight-sided cylindrical footing, by contrast, acts like a piston that frozen soil can grip and push upward along its entire length.

The Sonotube or form tube surface also plays a role. Smooth-sided tubes allow frozen soil to slide along the outside rather than gripping and lifting. Some builders wrap the upper portion of the Sonotube in plastic sheeting to reduce friction even further, which is a worthwhile step in Fredericton's heavy clay soils where frost grip is particularly strong.

Helical Piles as an Alternative

For decks where excavation is difficult — close to the house foundation, near underground utilities, or on steep terrain along the Saint John River valley — helical piles are an excellent alternative. These steel screw-like piles are mechanically driven into the ground to depths of 2 to 3 metres, well below any frost penetration. They bear on deep, undisturbed soil and are essentially immune to frost heave. The installation is fast, requires no concrete curing time, and produces minimal site disturbance. Helical piles cost more per footing than a poured Sonotube — typically $350 to $600 per pile installed in the Fredericton market — but for a heave repair where you are already tearing up landscaping and deck sections, the total project cost often comes out comparable.

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Q10

Should I cover my deck with a tarp during winter in Edmundston NB?

No — covering your deck with a tarp during winter is one of the most counterproductive things you can do, and in Edmundston's climate it will likely cause more damage than leaving the deck fully exposed to the elements.

The instinct to protect your deck makes sense, but tarps create a sealed environment that traps moisture against the deck surface. In Edmundston, which sits in the upper Saint John River valley and regularly sees some of the heaviest snowfall totals in New Brunswick — often exceeding 300 centimetres of cumulative snowfall per season — a tarp laid over the deck catches and holds snow. As daytime temperatures rise, snow melts against the tarp, and the water has nowhere to go. It pools on the deck surface, soaks into wood grain or sits against composite boards, and then refreezes overnight. This trapped moisture cycle is far more damaging than natural snowfall that blows across and off an uncovered deck.

The lack of air circulation under a tarp is the other major problem. Moisture from melting snow, ground vapour rising through the deck boards, and condensation that forms on the underside of the tarp all get trapped in a humid pocket. In spring, when you pull that tarp off, you will very likely find mould and mildew growth on the deck surface, particularly in corners and along the house wall where airflow was most restricted. On pressure-treated lumber, this means a serious power washing and possibly sanding to remove black mould staining. On composite decking, mould can establish itself in the textured grain pattern and be difficult to fully remove.

The right approach is to let your deck breathe through winter. A well-built deck is designed to handle New Brunswick weather — the boards are spaced to allow drainage, the structure is fastened with corrosion-resistant hardware, and the framing is ventilated underneath. Snow sitting on the deck surface is not inherently harmful as long as the deck was built to handle the load. In Edmundston, where snow loads can be substantial, the important thing is to shovel when accumulation exceeds 30 centimetres to prevent excessive weight on the joists and beams. Use a plastic-edged shovel and push snow off the sides rather than scraping down to bare board.

If your concern is protecting outdoor furniture rather than the deck itself, the better solution is to move furniture into a garage or shed for winter. Metal furniture is especially vulnerable to Maritime humidity and should come inside — it rusts aggressively through a New Brunswick winter even without a tarp. Teak and cedar furniture can stay outside if properly oiled in the fall, but bringing it under a roof is always preferable. Planters should come inside as well, because the freeze-thaw cycling in Edmundston will crack ceramic and even some resin planters over the course of a single winter.

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Q11

How do I prevent ice buildup on my deck stairs in Dieppe NB?

The most effective approach combines anti-slip tape on treads, calcium chloride for active ice, and textured composite stair treads if you are building or replacing stairs.

Deck stairs in Dieppe see some of the most treacherous ice conditions in the Moncton metro area. The combination of coastal moisture from the Petitcodiac River, frequent freeze-thaw cycles through a typical southeastern New Brunswick winter, and the fact that stairs are angled surfaces that shed water unevenly means ice forms on steps faster and more dangerously than on a flat deck surface. Stairs are where the majority of winter deck injuries happen, so this is worth getting right.

Anti-slip tape is the simplest and most cost-effective first line of defence. Industrial-grade adhesive grip tape designed for outdoor use can be applied directly to composite or pressure-treated stair treads in the fall before the first freeze. Look for tape rated for temperatures down to minus 30 degrees Celsius — lower-quality products lose adhesion in deep cold and peel off mid-winter, which is worse than having no tape at all because the curling edges become a trip hazard. Apply the tape in two strips per tread, one near the front nosing edge and one about midway back, leaving a small gap between strips so water can drain rather than pooling underneath the tape.

For active ice conditions, calcium chloride is the safest chemical option for both composite and pressure-treated stairs. Avoid rock salt entirely, as it corrodes the metal stair stringers and carriage bolts that hold the assembly together. In Dieppe's climate, where temperatures regularly hover around zero and swing above and below freezing within a single day, ice can reform within hours of clearing it, so keep a container of calcium chloride near your door for quick application.

If you are building new stairs or replacing worn treads, textured composite treads are worth the investment. Several manufacturers now offer stair-specific boards with a deeper embossed grain pattern that provides noticeably more grip than standard flat composite. These textured surfaces channel water away and give boots better purchase even when a thin ice film is present.

Structural Considerations for Dieppe Stairs

Make sure your stair stringers are properly supported at the bottom landing. In Dieppe, where frost penetrates to around 1.2 metres, stair stringers resting on a simple concrete pad on grade will shift as the ground heaves and settles through winter. A small concrete footing poured below frost depth at the base of the stairs keeps the entire assembly stable and prevents the uneven settling that creates low spots where water pools and freezes. Proper drainage around the stair landing — gravel base, slight grade away from the house — keeps meltwater moving rather than re-freezing on the bottom steps.

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Q12

Does freeze-thaw cycling damage pressure-treated deck boards in New Brunswick?

Yes, freeze-thaw cycling is the single biggest factor that shortens the lifespan of pressure-treated deck boards in New Brunswick, though the damage is gradual and largely preventable with proper maintenance.

Pressure-treated lumber is wood that has been infused with preservative chemicals to resist rot and insect damage, but the treatment does nothing to prevent moisture absorption. Wood is a porous material, and every time it rains, snows, or sits in humid Maritime air, the fibres absorb water. In New Brunswick, where winter temperatures can swing from minus 15 to plus 5 degrees Celsius within a 48-hour period, that absorbed water freezes and expands

inside the wood cells, then thaws and contracts, then freezes again. This mechanical stress — repeated dozens of times each winter — physically tears apart the wood fibres from the inside out.

The visible results show up as surface checking, which are the small cracks that run along the grain of the board. You will also see end-grain splitting where the board ends crack open, cupping where the board face warps into a concave shape, and eventually splintering where raised wood fibres break free from the surface. A deck in Fredericton or Moncton might go through 40 to 60 significant freeze-thaw cycles in a single winter. Over five or six years without any protective finish, those boards will show noticeably more degradation than the same lumber would in a climate with a single sustained freeze and thaw.

The key to slowing this process is reducing how much water the wood absorbs in the first place. A quality penetrating deck stain or water-repellent preservative applied every two to three years creates a barrier that dramatically limits moisture uptake. Penetrating finishes are far superior to film-forming sealers in New Brunswick's climate because film-forming products trap moisture underneath the coating when it inevitably cracks, which actually accelerates the freeze-thaw damage rather than preventing it.

Timing the application matters. In New Brunswick, the ideal window is late May through early June or September through mid-October, when temperatures are consistently above 10 degrees Celsius, humidity is moderate, and rain is less frequent. The wood needs to be clean and dry — power wash first, let the deck dry for at least 48 hours, then apply the finish.

Board selection also plays a role. Kiln-dried after treatment lumber, marked as KDAT, starts with a lower moisture content than standard pressure-treated boards and is more dimensionally stable through freeze-thaw cycles. It costs roughly 15 to 20 percent more than standard PT lumber, but the reduced checking, warping, and splitting over the deck's lifetime makes it a sound investment for any New Brunswick build. Incised lumber, which has small slits cut into the surface to allow deeper preservative penetration, also performs better because the treatment reaches further into the wood fibre where freeze-thaw stress occurs.

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Q13

Can I use salt or ice melt on my composite deck in Saint John NB?

You should never use rock salt or sand on a composite deck — calcium chloride and calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) are the only safe de-icing options for composite decking in Saint John.

Rock salt, which is sodium chloride, is the most common de-icer sold across New Brunswick, but it is genuinely harmful to composite deck boards. It leaves a white residue that etches into the surface over time, and the corrosive nature of sodium chloride attacks the metal fasteners and connectors holding your deck together. In Saint John's coastal climate, where salt air is already accelerating corrosion on every piece of exposed hardware, adding more sodium chloride directly onto the deck surface compounds the problem significantly.

Sand is the other product homeowners reach for, and while it seems harmless, it actually scratches composite decking. Those scratches accumulate over a single winter and leave the surface looking scuffed and worn, especially on darker-coloured boards where marks show easily. Once composite decking is scratched, the damage is permanent — you cannot sand and refinish composite the way you would pressure-treated lumber.

Calcium chloride is widely available at hardware stores in Saint John and across the province. It works at temperatures down to roughly minus 25 degrees Celsius, which covers even the coldest stretches of a typical Saint John winter. It melts ice quickly and does not damage composite surfaces, stainless steel screws, or hidden clip fastening systems. Spread it sparingly — a thin application is enough to break the bond between ice and the deck surface, and then you can shovel the loosened ice away.

Calcium magnesium acetate, or CMA, is the more environmentally friendly alternative. It is biodegradable, non-corrosive, and safe for composite materials. It costs more than calcium chloride but is worth considering if your deck is near garden beds or if runoff drains toward the Kennebecasis or Saint John River, where chloride accumulation in waterways is becoming a growing concern for municipalities.

For routine ice management through a Saint John winter, the best practice is to shovel snow promptly before it compacts into ice, and then apply calcium chloride only to the thin ice layer that remains. A plastic-edged shovel prevents gouging. If you stay on top of snow removal after each storm, you will rarely need much de-icer at all. When you do apply product, sweep up any remaining granules once the ice has melted to prevent prolonged chemical contact with the deck surface.

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Q14

What is the best way to protect deck furniture during a New Brunswick winter?

The best protection for deck furniture during a New Brunswick winter is to bring it indoors — into a garage, shed, or basement — because no cover or treatment can fully protect outdoor furniture from 5 months of snow loads, freeze-thaw cycling, ice, and sustained moisture that characterize winters across the province.

New Brunswick's winter climate is exceptionally punishing on outdoor furniture regardless of the material. The province receives 250 to 350 cm of snowfall depending on location, with Fredericton and Bathurst at the higher end and coastal areas like Saint John receiving slightly less but compensating with more freezing rain and ice storms. Temperatures routinely reach -20 to -30 degrees Celsius in January and February, and the constant freeze-thaw cycling — sometimes multiple cycles per week during transitional periods — is what truly destroys furniture left exposed. Water penetrates seams, joints, wicker weave, cushion foam, and fabric, then expands as it freezes, breaking down materials with each cycle.

For furniture that can be moved, indoor storage is straightforward and offers complete protection. Disassemble what you can to reduce storage footprint — table legs typically unbolt, umbrella poles separate from bases, and modular seating sections stack. Store cushions separately from frames in a dry location, as cushion foam that enters storage with any moisture content will develop mold over the winter. Stand cushions on edge rather than stacking them flat to allow air circulation on all surfaces.

For furniture that is too heavy or too built-in to move — permanent benches, heavy stone-top tables, cast iron sets — breathable furniture covers are the correct approach. Do not use plastic tarps, which are not recommended because they trap moisture against the furniture surface and create a humid microenvironment where mold thrives even in cold temperatures. When temperatures fluctuate above and below freezing, condensation forms on the inside of a plastic tarp, keeping the furniture perpetually damp. Breathable covers made from solution-dyed polyester fabric allow water vapour to escape while shedding rain and snow from the exterior surface.

Proper fit matters when using covers. A cover that is too large will catch wind and billow, allowing snow to enter from the bottom. Measure your furniture and purchase covers sized to the specific piece, securing them with bungee cords or tie-down straps. After heavy snowfalls, brush accumulated snow off the covers to prevent the weight from collapsing the cover onto the furniture.

Different furniture materials have different vulnerabilities. Aluminum frames are the most winter-tolerant and can survive outdoors with just a breathable cover. Teak and other hardwoods develop a grey patina but remain structurally sound if properly joined, though standing water that freezes in joints will eventually loosen them. Resin wicker becomes brittle at very cold temperatures and can crack if heavy snow compresses it. Wrought iron develops rust at any point where the powder coat has been scratched, and New Brunswick's salt-laden winter air accelerates this corrosion.

Cushions deserve special emphasis because they are the most vulnerable and expensive component. Modern outdoor cushion foam is open-cell polyurethane wrapped in solution-dyed acrylic fabric like Sunbrella, and while these materials resist moisture better than indoor upholstery, they are not designed for sustained winter exposure. Foam that absorbs water and freezes will break down structurally, losing resilience and developing permanent compression. A full set of quality outdoor cushions for a 6-piece seating group costs $600 to $1,200, making indoor winter storage the most cost-effective maintenance step you can take. Before storing for the season, clean every piece thoroughly, treat any rust spots on metal furniture, and apply a fresh coat of marine wax to aluminum and painted surfaces.

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Q15

Should I shovel snow off my deck in Fredericton NB?

Yes, you should shovel snow off your deck in Fredericton, particularly after heavy snowfalls or when accumulation exceeds 30 to 45 cm — Fredericton's snow load zone means your deck can experience loads of 2.0 to 3.5 kPa, and while a properly built deck handles this, repeated heavy accumulation of wet Maritime snow can approach the design limits of older or marginally constructed decks.

The physics of snow load on a Fredericton deck are not as simple as they might appear. Fresh dry snow weighs roughly 50 to 70 kg per cubic metre, which seems manageable. But Fredericton frequently receives wet, heavy snow from Atlantic weather systems, and this type of snow can weigh 200 to 400 kg per cubic metre. A 3.6 by 4.8-metre deck carrying 60 cm of compacted wet snow could be supporting 2,000 to 3,500 kg — well within the design capacity of a code-built deck, but potentially approaching the capacity of an older deck with deteriorated connections or undersized joists.

The practical rule for Fredericton homeowners is to shovel after any snowfall that adds more than 15 to 20 cm of wet heavy snow or 30 cm of lighter snow, and to never allow total accumulation to exceed about 45 cm regardless of snow type. If you notice any deflection in the deck surface, hear unusual creaking, or see gaps opening at connection points, clear the snow immediately and inspect the structure.

Use the right tool and technique to avoid damaging the deck while clearing snow. A plastic shovel is essential — metal shovels and metal-edged snow pushers will scrape, gouge, and scar both wood and composite deck surfaces. Choose a shovel with a flat blade rather than a pointed scoop, and push the snow with the grain of the deck boards, meaning in the same direction that the boards run. Pushing across the grain drives the shovel edge into the gaps between boards, catching on edges and prying up fasteners. You do not need to clear the deck down to bare wood — leaving a thin layer of 1 to 2 cm of snow actually protects the deck surface from foot traffic abrasion and prevents the shovel from making direct wood or composite surface hits.

For ice that forms on the deck surface after rain-on-snow events or during thaw-freeze cycles, use calcium chloride or calcium magnesium acetate as a deicer. Calcium chloride is effective down to approximately -25 degrees Celsius, covering the vast majority of Fredericton winter conditions, and it is safe for both pressure-treated wood and composite decking. Calcium magnesium acetate, often sold as CMA, is the safest deicer for all deck materials and is the product recommended by Trex and most composite manufacturers. Avoid rock salt entirely — it damages wood fibers, accelerates corrosion of metal fasteners and hardware, and will void the warranty on most composite decking products. Rock salt is also far less effective below -12 degrees Celsius, making it a poor choice for Fredericton's coldest periods.

The area directly against the house wall deserves extra attention during snow removal. Snow piled against the ledger board and house siding creates a sustained moisture source that can penetrate the building envelope, particularly if the ledger flashing has any gaps. Clear snow away from the house wall after every significant snowfall, and check that the drainage gap between the deck boards and the house allows meltwater to flow away

rather than pooling against the foundation.

Second-storey decks require more diligent snow management than ground-level decks because the consequences of structural overload are far more severe and because drifting patterns against the house wall can concentrate loads unevenly. For ground-level decks where structural collapse risk is minimal, snow removal is still recommended to reduce moisture exposure and extend the useful life of the decking material.

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Q16

How do I prepare my deck for winter in Moncton NB?

Begin your winter preparation in late October or early November by thoroughly cleaning the deck, inspecting all structural connections for summer damage, applying or refreshing a protective sealant if needed, and removing all items that can trap moisture or be damaged by freeze-thaw cycling — the goal is to send the deck into Moncton's 5-month winter season in the strongest, cleanest, driest condition possible.

Moncton presents a particularly harsh combination of winter conditions for deck structures. The city receives approximately 300 cm of snowfall annually, experiences snow loads between 2.0 and 3.5 kPa, and endures dozens of freeze-thaw cycles between November and April as Maritime weather systems alternate between cold Arctic air and milder Atlantic influences. Each freeze-thaw cycle drives moisture deeper into wood grain and widens existing checks and cracks, so minimizing the moisture content in your deck's wood before the first freeze is the single most impactful thing you can do.

Start with a thorough cleaning. If the air temperature is still above 10 degrees Celsius, power wash the entire deck surface, railings, and visible framing using a fan tip at moderate pressure — 1,500 to 2,000 PSI for pressure-treated wood, 1,000 to 1,200 PSI for cedar or composite. The objective is to remove dirt, mildew, leaf debris, and any organic matter that holds moisture against the wood surface. Pay particular attention to the gaps between deck boards where debris accumulates and traps water against the joists below. Allow the deck to dry completely for at least 48 hours before proceeding.

Inspect all structural connections while the deck is clean and visible. Check the ledger board flashing to ensure water is being directed away from the house wall. Examine joist hangers and post connections for corrosion, particularly if the hardware has been in place for more than 8 years. Look for any posts that have shifted due to frost heave — posts that have lifted even slightly indicate footings that may not extend to the full 1.2 to 1.5-metre frost depth required in the Moncton area.

If your deck is pressure-treated or natural wood, check whether the existing sealant is still functional by splashing water on the surface. If the water beads up, the sealant is intact. If it soaks in and darkens the wood, the sealant has worn through and the wood will absorb moisture all winter, leading to accelerated checking, splitting, and cupping through freeze-thaw cycling. Apply a fresh coat of penetrating deck sealant while temperatures remain above 10 degrees Celsius.

Remove all planters from the deck surface. Planters sitting on deck boards trap moisture underneath constantly, and freeze-thaw cycling will crack both the planters and the deck boards beneath them. Bring all deck furniture

indoors to a garage or shed if possible. If indoor storage is unavailable, use breathable furniture covers rather than plastic tarps. Tarps are not recommended because they trap moisture against surfaces, prevent air circulation, and create conditions for mold growth even in cold weather.

If you have a hot tub on the deck that you will not use over winter, winterize it by draining all water, blowing compressed air through the plumbing lines, adding plumbing antifreeze to the jet lines and pump housing, and securing an insulated cover. Any water left in the plumbing will freeze and crack fittings.

Finally, prepare your snow removal tools. Keep a plastic shovel designated for the deck — metal shovels will gouge wood and scratch composite surfaces. Always push snow with the grain of the deck boards. For ice, use calcium chloride or calcium magnesium acetate as a deicer — both are safe for wood and composite decking. Avoid rock salt entirely, as it damages wood fibers and voids warranties on composite products like Trex.

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