



Tag-team Teak Cleaners

Testers gauge two-part products on user friendliness, application, and effectiveness.

In March 2008, we tested one-part teak cleaners to see which ones eased the burden of maintaining teak decks without being too harsh on the wood, applicator, or environment. In this report, *Practical Sailor* follows up with an evaluation of two-part cleaners and how they compare to one another and to a top pick from the one-part test.

Each of the cleaning kits we tested this go-round comprised two parts. The first part was a cleaner designed to remove the bulk of the grit and grime. The second part was typically a brightener, however in some products, it also provided additional cleaning or was simply a neutralizing agent for the first part.

Most chemical teak cleaners are over-kill for regular maintenance of teak. For frequent cleanings, we suggest using a soft-bristled brush or scrubbing pad and a mild detergent—or skip detergents altogether and use only fresh or salt water (as many advocates of natural-looking teak do). A good scrubbing method is to go across the wood grain, rather than with it; this removes dirt and grime without removing the teak's soft wood. For tips on teak care from industry experts, check out the online version of this article at www.practical-sailor.com.

There are times when a serious teak cleaner is called for—like in preparation for applying a wood finish or before spring commissioning. But which one best suits your needs?

WHAT WE TESTED

Testers applied five two-part cleaners for this test. Four of these were liquids: Amazon's Quicki-II Teak Cleaner, Nautical Ease Teak Cleaner and Brightener, West Marine's Teak Cleaner and Brightener, and TE-KA Teak Wood Cleaner by Marinotex. Tip Top Teak combines liquid and granular powder parts.

To get an idea of whether using a two-part product is worth adding extra steps to the cleaning routine, we compared the five test products to Iosso Teak Cleaner, one of the top picks from our evaluation of one-part cleaners.

We also evaluated three one-part cleaners that were received too late to participate in the March 2008 test: TCL 200 Teak Cleaner Liquid and TCP 100 Teak Cleaning Powder from Teak-decking Systems and Yacht Shine Teak Cleaner from Capt John's Boat Brite Group. See "Test Update" on page 24 for the scoop on the latecomers.

HOW WE TESTED

Each teak cleaner was applied to a section of weathered teak decking aboard our test boat, a 1978 Union 36 docked in the Chesapeake Bay area. The boat's deck, which is exposed year-round, had been previously cleaned using a deck brush and fresh water eight months prior to the test.

Testers applied each product following the manufacturers' instructions. Because some of these products are

The two-part test products (from left): Amazon Quicki II, Tip Top Teak, West Marine Heavy-duty Cleaner-Brightener, Nautical Ease, and TE-KA Teak Wood Cleaner. The one-part Iosso Teak Cleaner (far right) was tested for comparison.

rather harsh, wearing appropriate protective clothing and eyewear is a must.

All of the test products were effective cleaners, so other evaluation points became important to picking winners. We rated each on its ease of use, including mixing, application, special precautions, and dwell time; eco-friendliness/harshness, based on the information provided by the makers; effectiveness of the brightener; price; and odor. As in our one-part test, composite scores were too close to indicate Best Choice overall. However, the testing did narrow the field to a choice of products that best meet specific needs or preferences.

AMAZON'S QUICKI II

Amazon, part of the New Jersey-based Marine Development Corp. (MDR), offers a full line of marine cleaners and maintenance products, including inflatable boat products, teak care, specialty products, and fuel additives.

We tested the company's Quicki II two-part Teak Cleaner, which Amazon touts as being environmentally safe. It has no caustics or acids and is non-butyl, so it won't harm fiberglass.

The Quicki II kit includes a scrubber; a cleaner for deep stains, grease, and grime; and a secondary agent with surface cleaners and brighteners. The application requires no mixing, but both parts 1 and 2 must be "agitated" with the supplied scrubber before being left to sit and then rinsing. The combined dwell time can be as long as 25 minutes.

Testers noted that the Quicki II Part 1 had no chemical smell, but Part 2 had a mild chemical smell.

Bottom line: Quicki II worked well with minimal scrubbing. Its biggest drawback is that the 25-minute dwell time stretches out teak cleaning sessions, but that is balanced by its eco-friendliness.

Photos by Frank Lanier

AS VALUE GUIDE		TWO-PART TEAK CLEANERS				
MAKER	AMAZON QUICKI II	NAUTICAL EASE	WEST MARINE HEAVY-DUTY	TE-KA WOOD CLEANER	TIP TOP TEAK CRYSTAL CLEANER	IOSSO (ONE-PART)
PRICE	\$28: 87¢ / ounce	\$22: 69¢ / ounce	\$37: \$1.16 / ounce	\$46: \$1.44 / ounce	\$42: \$1.31 / ounce	\$15: 3¢ / ounce
TYPE	Liquid	Liquid	Liquid	Liquid	Powder and liquid	Powder (mix with water)
ODOR	Slight smell	Some chemical odor	Some chemical odor	Some chemical odor	Some chemical odor	No smell
EASE OF USE	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good
ECO- / HUMAN-FRIENDLINESS	Good	Fair	Fair	Poor	Fair	Excellent
WOOD COLOR AFTER BRIGHTENER	Second lightest	Darkest	Lightest	Middle of the pack	Second darkest	NA
COMMENTS	Billed as one of the greener two-parts tested; cleaned well but also has one of the longest dwell times.	Pros: Good cleaning, short dwell time; least expensive. Cons: Additional caution required when used around painted, varnished, or gelcoated surfaces.	Pros: Short dwell time; won't harm seams; provided most uniform appearance. Cons: Somewhat toxic, caution required when using around painted, varnished, or gelcoated surfaces.	Pros: Rapid cleaning, short dwell time. Cons: Extremely corrosive, must mask off all adjacent surfaces prior to use. Worked well, but is most toxic and expensive.	Pros: Powder readily scours dirt away. Cons: Combined dwell time of 20 minutes; forms caustic solution when mixed with water, which must be kept from painted surfaces, fiberglass, and aluminum.	Pros: Cleans well, no damage to adjacent surfaces. Con: Dwell time 10 minutes.

Recommended Budget Buy

NAUTICAL EASE

Nautical Ease is manufactured by Nautical Technologies Inc., which offers a full line of marine maintenance products.

Nautical Ease Teak Cleaner and Brightener is formulated to quickly clean and brighten badly oxidized teak, and it does just that with powerful chemicals. The Part 1 cleaner contains caustic soda (sodium hydroxide), which can burn skin, and the Part 2 brightener and neutralizer contains phosphoric acid (an irritant to eyes and mucous membranes)—not exactly fun to play with.

Both parts had a moderate chemical smell, testers noted, and the directions recommended keeping the products away from varnished and painted areas as well as any gelcoat. Included in the kit are a pair of rubber gloves, a small brush, and a flip-top cap. The Nautical Ease is applied with the supplied brush, no mixing is required, and the dwell time is a quick 5 minutes.

Nautical Ease started lifting off dirt almost as soon as testers applied it and cleaned its section well.

Bottom line: The short dwell time is a plus; however, Nautical Ease is one of the more toxic two-part cleaners tested and the need to keep it clear of varnish, paint, and gelcoat is a con.

WEST MARINE HEAVY-DUTY KIT

Retail giant West Marine advertises its private-labeled teak cleaner for badly stained or weather teak. The two-part kit, made by Snyder Manufacturing, includes a cleaner and a neutralizer.

While the instructions claim that the product will not harm seam compounds, they do caution that it may damage gelcoat, paint, and metal surfaces. Its active ingredients also can be harmful to humans: Part 1 includes potassium hydroxide, an eye and skin irritant, while Part 2 contains oxalic acid, which is a poison and an eye and skin irritant. Testers reported that both parts had a moderate chemical smell.

The West Marine kit began powering away dirt and stains almost immediately. Users should apply the West Marine cleaner using a deck brush with synthetic bristles, according to the directions. The only “dwell” time is the wait while the area darkens, an estimated 3 to 5 minutes, before rinsing and applying the neutralizer.

Bottom line: A short dwell time is always a plus, and the West Marine cleaner produced the most uniform appearance of the cleaners evaluated. That being said, it's also a fairly toxic product.

TE-KA TEAK WOOD CLEANER

TE-KA maker Marine-Tex, part of the Illinois Tool Works Inc. family of companies, manufactures cleaners, adhesives, and epoxies for the marine industry. The TE-KA two-part cleaner was the only scrubless product in this test.

The TE-KA cleaner and neutralizer had only a moderate chemical smell; however, warnings abound on both containers about their extremely corrosive nature. With sodium hydroxide and phosphoric acid as their active ingredients, both are labeled as being able to cause severe eye and skin burns and respiratory tract irritation.

While there's no mixing and not much of a dwell time, there are several precautions users must take when applying TE-KA. All adjacent surfaces must be masked before applying the cleaner with a rough pad or low-bristled brush. Also, the manufacturer warns that if any



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Many products worked quickly, almost immediately upon application. The products in action here are TE-KA (top right) and Tip Top Teak powder.



One-part cleaners tested for this update (from left): Captain John's YachtShine, Teakdecking Systems' TCL 100 and TCL 200.

One-part Cleaners Part Deux

We recently tested a few products that were latecomers for the one-part teak cleaner test, which we reported on the March 2008 issue. This test update looks at the performance, user-friendliness, and eco-friendliness of Teakdecking System's TCP 100 cleaning powder and its TCL 200 liquid cleaner, as well as Capt. John's Yacht Shine. One-part cleaners are typically less harsh than two-part products and are easier to apply.

For easy comparison, we evaluated these using the same criteria and testing methods as we did with the products in the original test and the two-part cleaners. For the Value Guide listing the results of the March 2008 test, check out this article online at www.practical-sailor.com.

TEAKDECKING SYSTEMS TCP 100

Florida-based Teakdecking Systems (TDS) manufactures custom-built teak decks and cabin soles in addition to specialized products for cleaning and sealing teak.

The TCP 100 is a water-based powder cleaner designed for weekly or bi-weekly cleanings; it can be used full strength or mixed at various concentrations for light or heavy cleaning. Designed to not harm teak, caulking, hardware, or paint, the TCP 100 seemed quite benign during testing. It contains no acid or caustic soda and is not hazardous to the user or environment, according to TDS. More gentle than most of the products we tested, it had no smell. According to TDS, the TCP 100 was recently re-formulated and now includes a degreaser that "oxidizes to harmless components within 30-40 minutes after mixing."

TEAKDECKING SYSTEMS TCL 200

TDS's liquid teak cleaner, TCL 200, is designed for deeper cleaning, like those sessions maintained on a monthly basis. With a degreasing agent for removing stains such as soot, grease, or oil, the TCL 200 can be used full strength or diluted.

The sweet-smelling liquid is water-based, contains no acid, is not hazardous to the user or environment, and can be used to clean teak or other surfaces. According to TDS, the cleaner will not harm teak, caulking, hardware, or paint; however, it does contain Butyl Cellosolve, a skin irritant.

The TCL 200 is applied to wet or dry teak, depending on the level of cleaning you're doing, and then scrubbed with a soft-bristle brush or 3M scrub pad. A 10-minute dwell time is required.

Bottom line: The liquid was a bit messier than TCP's powder, but it did clean well. The degreasing agent is also a plus.

CAPTAIN JOHN'S YACHTSHINE

Made by the New York-based Brite Group—which also manufactures Boat Brite products—the YachtShine Teak Cleaner is billed as a ready-to-use "green" cleaner for all teak decks and trim. The maker claims that its chemistry deep cleans without damaging surrounding surfaces. The formula contains no phosphates or oxalic or hydrochloric acid. The biodegradable cleaner had no chemical smell and was the only product tested that advertises compliance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Clean Marina and Clean Boating program. YachtShine requires no dwell time and only light scrubbing.

Bottom line: YachtShine cleaned well with no dwell time. Its ability to cling to vertical surfaces is a plus.

PS VALUE GUIDE ONE-PART TEAK CLEANERS			
MAKER	CAPT. JOHN'S YACHTSHINE ✓	TEAKDECKING TCP 100 ✓	TEAKDECKING TCL 200 ✓
PRICE	\$17: 53¢ / ounce	\$10: 31¢ / ounce (full strength)	\$10: 31¢ / ounce (full strength)
TYPE	Gel	Powder	Liquid
ODOR	Slight smell	No smell	Slight smell
EASE OF USE	Excellent	Excellent (when not diluted)	Good+
ECO-FRIENDLINESS	Excellent	Good+	Good+
COMMENTS	Pros: Gel is easier to control & can be used on vertical and horizontal surfaces.	Pros: Can be diluted for more cleaning options; no damage to adjacent surfaces; has degreaser.	Pros: No damage to adjacent surfaces, has degreaser. Con: 10-minute dwell time.
✓ Recommended			

CONCLUSION

The recommended picks in our 2008 one-part cleaner test were the eco-friendly Captain John's Boat Brite, Interlux's Premium cleaner-brightener, the Budget Buy Iosso, and the versatile Star brite Gel Teak Cleaner-Restorer. So how did the latecomers compare?

Testers really liked the Teakdecking Systems products. Both cleaned well, were inexpensive and fairly easy to apply, and the fact they can be diluted to cover varying degrees of grime is a big plus. They both get our pick for their versatility and anti-toxic nature. Captain John's YachtShine was easier to apply than Boat Brite, and it also meets the EPA's criteria for an eco-friendly product. It gets our recommendation over Boat Brite for a green cleaner. Iosso remains our Budget Buy pick.



Nautical Ease



Tip Top Teak



West Marine Heavy Duty

of Part 1 is spilled, it should be immediately neutralized with Part 2 and rinsed. But most inconvenient is the fact that TE-KA cannot be left on caulk seams for more than 3 to 4 minutes before it must be neutralized. That means a full deck would have to be cleaned in small sections.

The TE-KA showed signs of powerful cleaning action immediately, and the short dwell time was a plus. Unfortunately, having to treat it like the acid-blood from one of the creatures in “Alien” doesn’t make it very user friendly.

Bottom line: It works great, but we’d opt for one of the less toxic products.

TIP TOP TEAK

Tip Top Products, based in Mississippi, markets a line of teak care products, including cleaners and sealers. Tip Top Teak Crystal cleaner and brightener is formulated to tackle large jobs like a deck.

Painted surfaces, fiberglass, and anodized aluminum should be masked off before Tip Top is applied. The primary ingredient for the cleaner, which forms a caustic solution when mixed with water, is 2-Butoxyethanol, an eye, skin, and mucous-membrane irritant. The brightener contains phosphoric acid, which can burn skin and irritate the respiratory tract. The deck-cleaning crystals had a mildly astringent odor, while the brightener had no odor, testers reported.

To apply, the Tip Top crystals are sprinkled liberally over a wet deck and let sit for 10 to 15 minutes, but the area should not be allowed to dry. A solution of 1 cup cleaner and a half-gallon water is used to keep the area wet. Following the dwell time, the area must be scrubbed and the brightener applied. It must be diluted with water and allowed to soak for about 5 minutes after application, then scrubbed and rinsed.

The cleaner worked well (possibly aided by the abrasive scouring action of the crystals) while the deck brightener began to visibly lighten the wood almost

instantaneously when applied.

Bottom line: Tip Top cleaned well, but the combined 20-minute dwell time, the harshness of the solution, and the need to constantly monitor its dryness are drawbacks.

IOSSO TEAK CLEANER

Our measuring stick in this test for comparison to one-part teak cleaners, the Iosso Teak cleaner is part of the Illinois-based company’s line of innovative, environmentally responsible cleaning products for the marine and RV markets.

The Iosso is a powder cleaner designed to remove dirt, black algae, and mildew stains without harsh chemicals. A 16-ounce container makes 4 gallons of cleaner; one scoop of powder makes a quart when combined with water.

We don’t really know what Iosso’s active ingredients are. They aren’t mentioned in product labeling, and the MSDS simply states “Trade Secret” for its ingredients. Iosso does claim that the cleaner emits no harmful vapors, is biodegradable, and non-toxic; won’t harm vinyl, canvas, carpet, metal, painted areas, fiberglass or plastic; and is gentle to skin. Neither the powder nor solution had any noticeable smell during application.

After mixing the cleaner and allowing it to dissolve, the solution can be applied to any horizontal or vertical surface and left to dwell for 10 minutes, or longer. The area must be kept wet with the solution, and the product literature states that extremely weathered wood may require a second application.

Testers were surprised in the 2008 test and again in this update that despite its gentleness, the Iosso is a top performer, even against the two-part cleaners.

Bottom line: The least harsh product in this test group, the Iosso was fairly easy to apply and was the most economical of the entire test group—even if a second application is required. Being a one-part product, it also requires fewer application steps.

CONCLUSION

Based on the harsh chemicals and toxic nature of most of the two-part cleaners, we consider them to be the “nuclear option.” We’d turn to them only for badly soiled teak that doesn’t respond to one-part cleaners. They should not be used for routine maintenance, in our opinion.

All of the two-part cleaners did the job and left a clean, bright deck. For a bargain buy, we recommend Nautical Ease Teak Cleaner and Brightener. If you prize brute cleaning power and quick results over being “green,” the West Marine Heavy-duty Teak Cleaner is a good choice. It cleaned as well as TE-KA, but was slightly less harsh and didn’t have such dire warnings about use near other surfaces. For those boat owners who may be cleaning teak below decks or who prefer an eco-friendly, less caustic cleaner, we recommend Amazon’s Quicki II.

Although it’s a bit like comparing apples to oranges, we still like the Iosso best overall, even compared to the two-parters. It’s safe to use, eco-friendly, and inexpensive, yet it cleans teak amazingly well. ▲

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