

Putting the fast in fastener

New decking fasteners are engineered for speed

Two qualities come to mind when I look at the evolution of decking fasteners over the past couple of years: speed and ease. Whether you're face-screwing deck boards or prefer the seamless look of a hidden-fastener system, manufacturers have begun focusing on tools and fasteners that help to get your deck finished faster than ever.

Mike Guertin is editorial adviser. Photos by Dan Thornton, except where noted.

Plowing pilotless through hardwoods

Years ago, fastening deck planks with screws was a time-consuming, two-step process: Drill a pilot hole in the face of the board, then drive the screw. A few years ago, screw makers engineered special screws that didn't require pilot holes for softwoods and many synthetic decking brands. The screws have tips that cut cleanly through decking and heads that neatly part the wood or composite surface for a neat, countersunk set. Only recently, though, have these pilotless screws been made compatible on hardwood decking like meranti, garapa, and ipé.

Manufacturers offering autofeed screw guns are on top of this category with the Ejector screw from Muro (www.muro.com), the #IPESS10212 from PAM Fastening Technology (www.pamfast.com), and the DHPD Hardwood Deck Screw from Simpson Strong-Tie (www.strongtie.com). If you're driving screws with a standard screw gun, consider Splitstop screws or Starborn Industries' Razorback screws to minimize the chance of splitting. The screws work well in general, but there are always those harder-than-usual boards that bog down a screw until it snaps, or a wild grain that's just ready to split. To avoid mishaps, set your drill-driver torque limit down a few notches, keep your eye out for wild grain, and take the time to drill pilot holes in butt joints between boards, just in case.



Headcote
Razorback



NailScrews for composite decking

Screws that nail?

If you think collated deck screws beat the pants off hand-driving loose screws, then you're really going to like pneumatically driven screws. Imagine tripling or quadrupling your deck-fastening efficiency using the framing nailer you already have. NailScrews from Universal Fastener Outsourcing (UFO; www.911-nails.com) and Scrail fasteners from Fasco America (www.fascoamerica.com) are screws with ballistic points like those found on powder-actuated concrete nails. Just load the collated screws into a framing nailer, and blast down decking just like in the old days. Screw head too proud? Use a drill-driver and bit to spin it in further. Have to remove a board? Unscrew it. What's not to like?

The pneumatically driven screw threads are unique; think of a cross between a ring-shank nail and spiral-shank nail. Like one-way barbs, the spiral threads drive into wood like a nail but won't pull out, only unscrew.

Here are a few pointers for a decent-looking job using pneumatically driven screws. Use a no-mar nose protector on your nailer, and switch to sequential (as opposed to bump-fire) mode for precise positioning of each fastener. Adjust the depth of drive so that the head of the screw is flush with the face of the board, not sunk below it. Avoid nailing butt joints; drill pilot holes and sink traditional screws in these spots.

Chances are that with the array of head styles, lengths, and color coatings available from UFO and Fasco, you may never return to spinning in screws again.

DHPD Hardwood
Deck Screws



Decking is outdoor flooring, right?

Why not install decking with a flooring nailer? You can now with the HIDfast tool (www.hid-fast.com), a decking nailer that looks and works like a pneumatic flooring nailer. Compared to ordinary hidden deck-fastening systems, this one is lightning fast. The key to the concept is in the design of the fastener. The primary shank drives diagonally through the board and into the deck joist. At the head, there's a pin that sticks straight out, ready to engage the next plank that is installed.

A retractable stop registers the joist side so that the nailer drives the fasteners dead center on each joist. After driving fasteners through the decking into each joist, a mallet and block are used to tap the next deck board onto the pins. You also can use a deck-board-straightening tool to push the boards onto the pins. If you're using pregrooved deck boards, a baseplate attachment microadjusts the height of the fastener pin to match any groove level.

The HIDfast system works great with most square-edged synthetic and softwood decking. Hardwood decking and dense composite decking require a groove or bump slot in the edge of the oncoming plank to engage the fastener pins.

The tool is pricey, but some lumberyards are renting or loaning them out with a minimum fastener purchase. This is a good option if you build decks only occasionally or just want to try out the HIDfast system before dipping too deep into your pocket.



HIDfast nailer

What's on deck

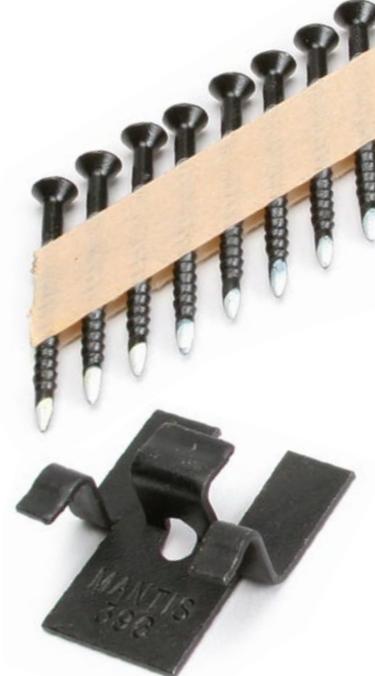
The inventors aren't done yet.

Be on the lookout for collated hidden decking fasteners that will be delivered to the nose of a nailer and attached with a pneumatically driven screw—kind of like a cap nailer for decking. Prototypes I've seen are sure to be the next step in the evolution of hidden fasteners for decking.

Pneumatic screws to the rescue—again

What if you take a metal-connector nailer, load it with pneumatically driven screws, and shoot the hidden-fastener clips in place? Tiger Claw and SureDrive have done just that with the Tiger Claw Installation Gun (www.deckfastener.com) and the Eliminator tool (www.suredrive.com). Tiger Claw's tool has a specially designed nosepiece that accepts the Tiger Claw TC-G and TimberTech Concealoc hidden fasteners. Just slide a fastener onto the nose, orient the nailer and fastener to the slot in the deck plank, and pull the trigger. The pneumatically driven screw hits the mark every time. The Eliminator works with SureDrive's Mantis hidden fastening clip. Slip a Mantis clip into the decking groove, fit the screw tip protruding from the nailer's nose—painted white for easy visibility—to the hole in the clip, and pull the trigger.

Some of you may be thinking that installing hidden decking fasteners pneumatically isn't anything new. You're right. Some EB-TY (www.ebty.com) users have been shooting down clips for years using a pneumatic stapler. I checked with EB-TY about this practice and was assured that the recommended stainless-steel staple has comparable holding power to a screw and can be used with all plastic EB-TY hidden fasteners.



Positive placement NailScrew and Mantis clip

Matchmaking: decking and fasteners

Decking is expensive, and synthetic-decking prices run close to and sometimes greater than those for premium wood decking. Be sure that the hidden-fastening system you use is compatible with the decking you plan to install. Many deck-plank manufacturers make the choice simple by offering proprietary fasteners, which are typically modified versions of common hidden-fastening systems. The benefit of these modified systems is the assurance that the fasteners match the slot width, depth, and height, and automatically gauge the proper joint spacing.

If your preferred brand of synthetic decking doesn't offer a hidden fastener, check to see if the manufacturer recommends a specific brand for its boards. You also can ask hidden-fastener companies with which brands their fasteners are most compatible.

Equator ▶

Latitudes Decking
(Universal Forest Products)
www.ufpi.com/product/latitudes/accessories/equator.htm



Sabre

CrossTimbers (GAF)
www.gaf.com/decking/decking-accessories.asp



Concealoc ▶

TimberTech
www.timbertech.com/products/finishing-touches/concealoc-fasteners



Fastenator

Correct Deck (GAF)
www.correctdeck.com/products/decking/channeled.htm



Trex Hideaway ▶

Trex
www.trex.com/hideaway



Crown Clips

Monarch
www.monarchdeck.com/decking_crownclips.php



Fiberon Hidden Fasteners ▶

Fiberon
www.fiberondecking.com/products/hardware



EG 1-2-3

EverGrain (Tamko)
www.evergrain.com/create/decking/installation.jsp