

Exterior Wood Finishes: Teak Oils

Interlux and Semco top list for ease of application.

Most of us have a soft spot for those classic beauties trimmed with teak decks and wood coamings, toerails, and tillers. They evoke romantic ideas of riding wind, water, and wave—a visceral attraction that no nonskid deck or aluminum toerail can ever match.

Unless, of course, the teak-laden ship is yours, then the brightwork is most often just that: work. Even if you're of the nature-over-nurture crowd that prefers the silvered patina of teak-*au-naturelle* to a satiny varnish or deep oil, you've likely logged many hours cleaning the wood.

Aside from aesthetics, what differentiates wood finishes is the work required—and to some degree, the protection they offer. With varnish, there's a big upfront investment of time and energy—and taking it down is a bear—but the coating can last multiple seasons. With synthetics and stains, less work is required initially, but maintenance will be more frequent than with varnish. The same can be said of oils, however, they typically must be reapplied every few months.

In this, the fourth installment in our ongoing look at exterior wood coatings, we're focusing on the application of teak oils and sealers. The previous segments covered one-part (August 2007) and two-part varnishes (December 2007), and synthetics and stains (October 2007).

WHAT WE TESTED

For this test, *Practical Sailor* evaluated eight teak oils and sealers. For teak, oils seem to be a good compromise between the hardworking varnishers and the do-nothing crowd.

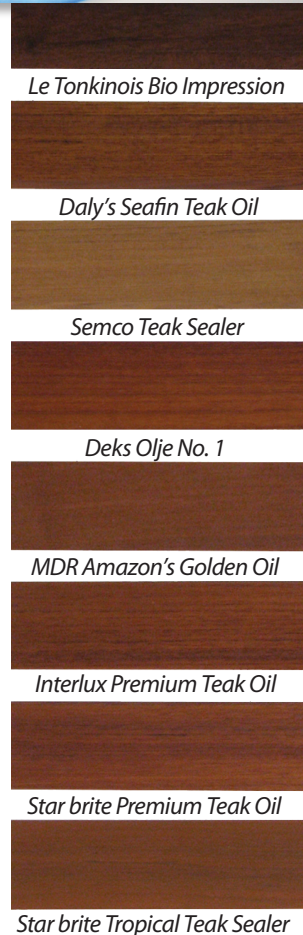
While there are many on the market, we



Of all the oils and sealers tested, Daly's Seafin was the only one that required sanding between coats. Here, PS tester Mike Collins wet-sands the Daly's as we launch a head-to-head test between it and a synthetic, Sikkens Cetol Natural, on this Cape Dory 25 in Sarasota, Fla. We'll be reporting on this and other longterm wood finishes tests in future issues.

tested products that performed well in past tests or were suggested to us by readers and industry pros: Daly's Seafin Teak Oil, Dek's Olje No. 1, Interlux Premium Teak Oil, Le Tonkinois Huiles Bio Impression, MDR Amazon's Golden Teak Oil, Semco Teak Sealer, Star brite Premium Golden Teak Oil, and Star brite Tropical Teak Sealer.

Choosing to apply an oil or sealer to exterior wood rather than use another coating or nothing at all, as always, boils down to a boat owner's taste, maintenance schedule, deftness with a brush, and boat usage. When choosing a wood coating, be sure to take into consideration where the wood is located and how much handling or traffic the spot is likely to see. For decks and other areas where nonslip surfaces are warranted, oils/sealers or synthetic/stains are the obvious



PRODUCT	PRICE ** / SOURCE	ORIGINAL FINISH	NO. OF COATS*	RECOAT WAIT*	EASE OF PREP	EASE OF APPLICATION
Daly's Seafin Teak Oil	\$16 go2marine.com	Amber, wood grain shines through, slight gloss	6	8-24 hours	Excellent	Fair
Deks Olje No. 1	\$19 / discountmarine supplies.com	Honey, very slight sheen	Many coats over 6 hours	15 minutes (3 days to cure)	Excellent	Fair
Interlux Premium Teak Oil ✓	\$24 (\$12 per 16.9 ounces) jamestowndistributors.com	Amber-honey, slight gloss	1-2	None	Excellent	Excellent
Le Tonkinois Huiles Bio Impression	\$33 American Rope & Tar	Warm, dark amber, no gloss	3-4	30 minutes	Excellent	Excellent
MDR Amazon's Golden Teak Oil	\$17 jamestowndistributors.com	Honey, no gloss	3	15 minutes	Good	Good
Semco Teak Sealer ✓ (Natural)	\$26 jamestowndistributors.com	Light tan, no gloss, looks like just sanded and has no finish	At least 2	None for sealer	Good	Excellent
Star brite Premium \$ Golden Teak Oil	\$19 jamestowndistributors.com	Amber-honey, no gloss	1-2	at least 5 minutes	Good	Excellent
Star brite Tropical Teak Sealer (Classic Teak)	\$18 discountmarine supplies.com	Opaque, warm brown, no gloss	1-2	None	Good	Excellent

✓ Recommended \$ Budget Buy *Maker's recommendations for bare wood. **Prices per quart; cost calculated when product sold in metric sizes.

choice. They also are an appropriate solution for areas that see a lot of action: cup holders, grab rails, etc.

Wood finished with teak oil or sealer will never chip, crack, peel, or blister the way a varnish does. The wood's natural oils tend to push off hard finishes. Teak oil, however, simply replaces the wood's natural oils.

What sets a teak oil and a teak sealer apart is the amount of solids in the product. Sealers usually have a higher percentage of solids, providing better protection from UV light and allowing the coating to build up faster on the substrate. They also last longer than oils typically.

The bonus of teak oils' easy application comes at the cost of more frequent applications and finish longevity. When it comes to the durability of a single application, teak oils can't compare to other finishes. And some teak oil critics maintain that the finish attracts dirt and encourages mold and mildew growth.

Oils don't protect the wood as well as a thick coat of hard varnish or a pigmented stain with its ultraviolet (UV) blockers. But they do offer more armor than nothing at all. Although silvered teak appeals to many boat owners' tastes, over time, untreated teak can take on a washboard appearance.

The only teak oil that made it to *Practical Sailor's* Teak Treatment All Stars finale in the Feb. 15, 2005 issue was Deks Olje No. 1. Testers noted that it penetrated better than any of the varnishes, synthetics, or pigmented stains, but that it was long gone at the six-month mark while other types of coatings were still going strong.

HOW WE TESTED

Testing for this group of exterior finishes followed the same protocol as our recent wood coatings tests. All prep work and applications were conducted per manufacturers' instructions.

Note that the Value Guide table above lists ratings for each product's ease of preparation and ease of application. Because teak oils typically have a low-gloss or matte finish, testers opted not to rate their glossiness and instead listed our observations.

As with the synthetics and stains test panels, we were not able to apply all of the teak oil test products to a single piece of teak because some arrived late, after the original teak had been used up. More than half of the panels were of the same teak, while the Semco and Daly's are applied to sections of another teak plank. The Le Tonkinois Bio Impression, a new

product, was applied to a darker piece of teak, and while the finish is darker than others, it appears more so due to the hue of the unfinished teak. Testers kept these differences in mind when rating the panels.

Stay tuned for the results of our next phase of testing: The Rack. For longterm durability testing, the eight teak oil panels have been mounted alongside the dozens of other test panels on a large wood rack set up outdoors in the torturous South Florida weather. These results will offer a larger picture of which type of wood finish weathers the elements the best and which products are the standouts in their respective categories. Look for rack updates in future issues.

DALY'S SEAFIN TEAK OIL

A Washington-based finishes manufacturer, Daly's offerings include a line of marine wood products. Its Seafin Teak Oil can be applied to interior or exterior wood and is recommended for teak, mahogany, and other hard woods.

It was the only teak oil tested that required sanding between coats. While this was an added step, testers found that the wet sanding resulted in a more even application and smoother finish. More of a bother was the recoat

COMMENTS

Apply with brush or cloth; must wet sand between first few coats; very pale tea color; very thin consistency.

Apply with brush or roller; maintenance: rinse with fresh water often and touch up as necessary; will stain metal fittings and fiberglass.

Apply with brush or cloth; maker claims it's "safe for use around fiberglass, wood, metal, painted surfaces;" does have petroleum distillates, so can be harmful.

Apply with brush or roller; eco-friendly; new product.

Apply with cloth; penetrating oil/sealer; must dilute with teak prep: 3:1 for first two coats; application rating held back by mixing requirements.

Apply with foam brush, first and second coats back to back; it can be followed with a clear overcoat; seasonal freshwater rinsing and recoat suggested.

Apply with sponge, cloth, or brush; includes petroleum distillates, so proper safety precautions (gloves, protective eyewear, etc.) are required.

Apply with foam brush; developed for tropical climes; maintenance doesn't require whole area to be recoated, just touch up as needed; Star brite Gel Formula Teak will completely remove sealer.



The test products, top row from left, Star brite Tropical Teak Oil, Star brite Premium Golden Teak Oil, Interlux Premium Teak Oil, MDR Amazon's Golden Teak Oil, and Daly's Seafin Teak Oil; bottom row, Semco Teak Sealer, Le Tonkinois Huiles Bio Impression, and Deks Olje No. 1.

wait time, eight to 24 hours, the longest of all the tested oils.

The Daly's Seafin was the only oil with a significant gloss to it. Aesthetically, the finish was one of testers' favorites. However, we've heard reports from Daly's users that although it looks great at first, the coating will quickly fade to gone. As this is the first time we've included the Seafin in our coatings evaluation, we're curious to see how durable it is.

Bottom Line: The Seafin finish looks great and the prep is minimum, but the required wet-sanding, lengthy recoat time, and six-coat minimum leave it with a Fair for ease of application.

DEKS OLJE NO. 1

Made by the Flood Co., Deks Olje No. 1 is the first part of a two-step wood protection system. Deks Olje No. 1 is a penetrating oil that can be overcoated with Deks Olje No. 2 for a gloss finish. (PS reviewed the full system, Nos. 1 and 2, in the October 2007 issue.)

Following manufacturers orders, testers applied numerous coats to the Deks No. 1-only panel. Once the application is completed, a three-day curing time is needed before the wood can be put into use or overcoated.

The Deks panel had some sheen

to it, not a gloss, but a very slight sheen. It can be used on any wood, above or

below the waterline.

Bottom Line: While the Deks No. 1 wasn't the easiest application—due to the many coats that can be laid on in six hours—no between-coats sanding is required, and testers liked the warm finish.

INTERLUX PREMIUM TEAK OIL

Premium Teak Oil is part of the teak care system manufactured by marine coatings giant Interlux. The company describes the product as a "traditional Scandinavian formula."

It was the only oil tested that touted a rust inhibitor to protect metal fasteners and deck hardware from corrosion. With a linseed and tung oil base, Interlux Premium was the only product that claimed it could be successfully applied to damp wood—this could be a real time-saver in shower-prone and humid areas, but it's not recommended.

Like most makers, Interlux suggests cleaning the wood with its own teak cleaner, Premium Teak Restorer, a PS Recommended product in the March 2008 teak cleaners test. To maintain the finish, reapply the oil seasonally.

Bottom Line: Among the easiest to prep for and apply, the Interlux is a Recommended product. Testers also liked its bright, warm finish.

LE TONKINOIS BIO IMPRESSION

American Rope and Tar, U.S. distributors of the well-known traditional varnish oil Le Tonkinois, have a new product on the shelves, Le Tonkinois Huiles Bio Impression.

It can be used alone, as a penetrating oil-sealer with a matte finish, or as a sealer base coat before applying the Le Tonkinois Original for a glossy finish. Bio Impression's makers do not recommend using it alone, but there are boat owners who prefer its matte finish, so we thought we'd see how it fares solo and with the Original overcoat. (The Bio Impression-Original application will be reviewed in a soon-to-come report on other late-comers.) The Bio alone does offer some protection, but it will not have the longevity it would with the varnish overcoat, according to ART's Bill Rickman.

Like all Le Tonkinois products, the Bio Impression is 100 percent natural. It contains linseed, castor, and palm oil, and has a slightly darker hue than the other products. It took a little longer to dry in the Florida humidity, but its prep and application are easy.

Bottom Line: At \$33 per quart, it's the most expensive test product by far, and that keeps it out of the winner's circle thus far.



Teak Deck Dealings

In all of our research and countless boatyard conversations, we have yet to come across an established standard for caring for teak decks. Many prefer to let nature do the work, and they leave the decks to saltwater scrubs underway and freshwater rinses in the rain. Others are the nurturing kind who sand it, clean it, and oil it with a gentle hand. What follows is a sampling of teak deck tips from those who know such things.

Jeff Scott, Teakdecking Systems: "We do not recommend any coating or sealer on a

teak deck...It is best to leave a teak deck in its natural state and simply keep it clean."

Ted Fontaine, Friendship designer: Once or twice a year, apply a teak cleaner and follow it with Semco Teak Sealer.

Beth Leonard, circumnavigator and author, *The Voyager's Handbook*: "After a passage or two, teak oil (on decks) turns black unless treated with an antifungal agent. It doesn't hold up to offshore passagemaking and will be scrubbed off after a few months of exposure to the sea and sun."

MDR AMAZON'S GOLDEN OIL

Made by Marine Development and Research, Amazon's Golden Teak Oil is a sealer and a wood finish. Like the Bio Impression, it is biodegradable and non-flammable.

Prior to oiling, a teak cleaner and Amazon's Teak Prep are maker-recommended. The directions call for the oil to be diluted with the Teak Prep at a 3:1 ratio and to be applied with a cloth, never a brush.

It's rated for interior or exterior wood, hot or cold weather. The finish leans toward a warm-honey, where most others have an amber hue.

Bottom Line: The product went on nicely and it's comparatively inexpensive, but the prep and application are slightly more arduous than some other products in the test. Durability testing will determine whether the added work is worth it.

SEMCO TEAK SEALER

The Semco Teak Sealer is highly touted by boatbuilders and boat owners. Many boat manufacturers like to use it on teak decks because of its barely-there appearance.

Semco comes in several colors that can be mixed to create a custom color. We used the Natural Semco and found that the thin liquid had a yellow-paint look to it. It must be stirred regularly to ensure even coloring, and as it's stirred, the yellow gives way to a warm, golden color. Once the test panel dried, it looked as if it had no coating on it at all. According to Semco's makers, the advantage is that

it allows the wood's natural grain to shine through without turning gray or allowing mildew to grow.

To prep, Semco suggests cleaning the wood with a two-part cleaner. Application is easy: two, back-to-back coats with a foam brush. It is recommended only for exterior wood.

Bottom Line: Tester's excitement over Semco's super easy application was tamed by the product's stout price—\$26 per quart—but we still recommend it for coating decks.

STAR BRITE PREMIUM GOLDEN

From Star brite, a major player in the boat maintenance game, we tested the Premium Golden Teak Oil, a sealer and a finish with UV blockers. It uses chemically modified natural oils to protect the wood.

For preparation, the maker suggests using Star brite Teak Cleaner. In our recent test of teak cleaners (March 2008), we found that Star brite's Gel Teak Restorer performed better.

Bottom Line: The warm amber finish shows off the teak's grain, and it was a breeze to apply. At \$19 quart, it gets the *PS* Budget Buy.

STAR BRITE TROPICAL SEALER

Star brite's Tropical Teak Sealer (Classic Teak) is as easy to apply as the Premium and goes on a bit thicker.

Testers initially noted it was a bit muddy. Its orangish tint was reminiscent of the original Cetol products. Often these type of products have a high solids content and offer better UV protection than clear products.

We'll see whether this benefits long-term protection.

Unlike other teak oils and sealers, Star brite claims, this one doesn't get darker with time, it just eventually fades away.

Bottom Line: Testers did not favor the opaque finish, but it was fairly easy to apply and could prove to offer superior durability. We'll see.

CONCLUSION

Recommended products are Semco for decking and Interlux's Premium Teak Oil. Star brite's Premium Golden Oil gets the Budget Buy nod. Remember, these ratings are for application and initial results. Our longterm test may find that the more difficult a product is to apply, the longer it lasts—or we may luck out and find that the easiest is also the most durable.

We'll keep you posted on the progress of this and our other wood coatings tests. ▲

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