

Do It Yourself

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Woodworking FAQ: Protecting Outdoor Furniture

From "[Ask DIY](#)"

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Here DIY Woodworking expert Bruce Johnson answers viewers' questions about ways to protect their outdoor furniture from two of Mother Nature's biggest everyday challenges: sun and rain.

Q: My cedar furniture has turned gray. Can I restore it to its natural look?

A: Yes, you can. Take a look at these two chairs (**figure A**): the one on the left is the natural cedar color, and the one on the right has been bleached by the sun. I can't sand the finish back to the way it looked before, but I can bleach it with a product made especially for wood (**figure B**). It's a two-part bleach that you mix and apply with a bristle brush (be sure to follow safety precautions when you're working with this product -- wear gloves and eye protection). Just combine equal amounts of the two parts in a plastic container (proportions aren't critical -- just guess at it); brush it on the wood (**figure C**) and watch it get to work! You may have to apply it more than once, but when the wood has achieved the color you want, apply vinegar to neutralize any bleach left in the wood.

Q: I have a handmade outdoor chair with a finish on it. I think it needs something more. What do you recommend?

A: The first thing I would do is clean the surface with ordinary paint thinner or mineral spirits, applied with a rag. Then I wipe off the excess and brush on a finish such as outdoor varnish or spar varnish, being extra careful to get plenty around any screws to prevent rust.

Q: I've heard that cedar furniture should be treated with oil. Is this true?

A: You could treat it with oil, or you could put on an exterior finish. Use furniture-grade (not lemon) oil such as tung oil or a wipe-on polyurethane. Apply with a rag or a sponge brush, working it into the wood, especially on the end grain. The oil finish will be very thin, not as protective as a full-strength exterior-grade polyurethane. You'll probably need to apply it annually for best results.



Figure A



Figure B



Figure C

RESOURCES:

Shop Tested Outdoor Furniture You Can Make: From the Editors of Wood Magazine

Model: 069620746X

Author: The Editors of *Wood Magazine*

Outdoor Furniture for the Backyard Builder : Easy-To-Build Projects for the Yard & Deck

Model: 0762101806

Author: Bill Hylton, et al

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