



## Online tools help you quickly create the deck of your dreams

**T**he internet has been a boon for weekend handy-men and do-it-yourselfers. There's a seemingly unlimited amount of online tutorials, videos, plans and other resources for those who want to take matters into their own hands. You can find instruction on auto maintenance, appliance repair, plumbing, electrical work and all other manner of home repair and construction.

My latest DIY project is to build a small deck for a relative. In the past I would have drawn up plans and researched construction specs and building codes in trade books.

But recently I started by going to **Lowes.com**, the website for the big box hardware and building supply chain. There's a drop-

down Departments menu on the upper left of the home page. If you hover over it and then hover over the Building Supplies link, it opens a second fly-out menu. Select Decking and Porches from that menu. In the middle of the page that opens there's a link labeled Design It. That opens the Deck Design Tool page. Click on Design My Deck and you open the Deck Designer.

Once in the Deck Designer, you can select from pre-designed decks that you can alter, or design one from scratch. I used the latter.

The program opens with a 3D rendering of a 20-foot by 20-foot free-standing deck. You can rotate and pan to view the deck from any angle. On the left of the page are the design tools.



You start with the top tool and work your way down through them to complete your design. When you select a tool, a how-to box opens explaining how to use it.

The first tool is Dimensions. You can drag the sides of the deck to make them longer or shorter. As you drag, measurements appear alongside so you can be accurate within an inch.

You set the deck height in a similar fashion, dragging it up or down until it's the right height.

Next is the shaping tool. It allows you to change the simple rectangle to more complex shapes. You can cut out or add rectangles, angles and curves. As you make any adjustments the 3D rendering updates to preview the changes from all directions.

As you go through the tools, you can add levels, stairs, railings, walls, doors and windows. You can choose different building materials such as wood, composite or metal. Another tool allows you to select the sizes of the joists, beams and posts. And finally, you can upload a picture of your house to see how it would look with the new deck.

Once your design is finished, you can save it and get a complete list of materials, including the cost. You also get 3D images

of the deck and simple plans of the framing and cuts.

You can send or take the finished plans to Lowes to order the materials. Or you can take the list to another supplier for other estimates. Home Depot has a similar program, but you have to download and install it rather than just work online. Both stores will design a deck for you if you come in with your specs.

The program is fast and easy to use. You can design a simple deck in 15 or 20 minutes and a more complex one in less than an hour. It's a great tool that saves you a lot of time on the design side of your project.

**KEVIN O'NEILL** is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at [koneill@timeshamrock.com](mailto:koneill@timeshamrock.com).