

## **Ipe Decking & Climate**

Ipe decking and flooring has become massively popular over the last few years. So much so, that the U.S. has experienced a shortage of the material in recent years. While demand has been high, the slow-down in building and remodeling across the country have decreased the price lumber suppliers can pay for Ipe, just as availability has fallen. FSC Ipe is particularly hard to find because the wood became so popular that Brazilian timber companies ran low on the supply of sustainably harvested material.

Limited availability may get people rethinking the benefits of Ipe, and that will certainly take some pressure off the market. While we think Ipe is a great material for decking, there are important things to take into consideration if you are thinking about building your next deck or outdoor project with Ipe. First and foremost, you should consider the climate in which you live. Ipe is an incredibly dense, hard and beautiful tropical product. It has been well-marketed in the United States and as a result, is often specified in large commercial projects. In our commitment to sustainability, AltruWood has been one of the nation's largest suppliers of FSC certified Ipe decking; however, we have learned important lessons over the years that we would like to share.

Humid, moisture-rich climates such as the Pacific Northwest, Northeastern US and Southern Canada do very well with Ipe Decking. We have been proud to supply projects such as the South Waterfront Boardwalk in Portland, Oregon and more recently Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto, Ontario.

Ipe does not perform well in dry, arid climates such as mountain towns and sections of the western US. Upon discovering the natural beauty of Ipe, a few casinos in Las Vegas ordered the decking, only to find it needed replacing within a few years with a more climate-appropriate product.

One way to analyze if your climate is the correct climate for Ipe Decking is by using the Köppen climate classification system. This classification system states that vegetation is the best expression of climate. It also combines average annual and monthly temperatures and precipitation. In the image below, you can see that Ipe comes from a Group A climate (tropical/megathermal). As a building material, it will function well in Group D climates (continental/microthermal) and some Group C (specifically Csa, Csb, & Cfa). These areas have enough humidity and precipitation to help the wood last. When it comes to Ipe, or any tropical wood, Group B stands for "bad". While this is by no means a perfect system, it is intended as a starting point in determining if Ipe Decking is the right product for your climate.

Additionally, in thinking about Ipe, understand the role that marketing is playing in your decision. Ipe has been well-marketed throughout the United States and as a result, is specified in many big, commercial projects. Other tropical woods such as Cumaru and TigerWood are also beautiful and worth considering. A big aspect of supporting sustainable forestry is in having diversity in the woods that we use from our forests.

We also hope that in considering Ipe decking, you seriously think about purchasing FSC Certified Ipe Decking. It is estimated that around 15% of the trillion dollar wood products trade involves wood that is illegally harvested. The largest percentage of illegal harvesting originates from tropical forests. Illegal harvesting devastates local environments and their economies. We are happy to help you identify sustainable alternatives to potentially illegally harvested material.

