

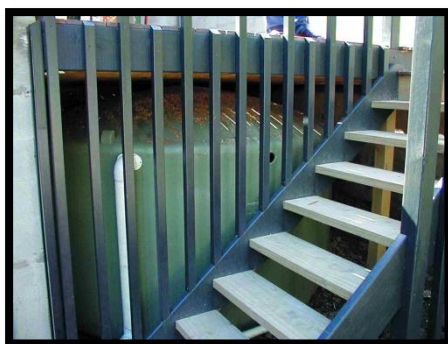
## ***The External Stairway to...*** *Everything you need to know about external staircases*

In our beautiful summery climate, many Queenslanders own homes with external staircases. Whether they lead to a deck, a pool area or to the home itself, there are a few things every home owner needs to know about external stairs. If you need to install an external staircase, repair an existing staircase, or simply need some tips on how to maintain your external stairs, you have come to the right place!

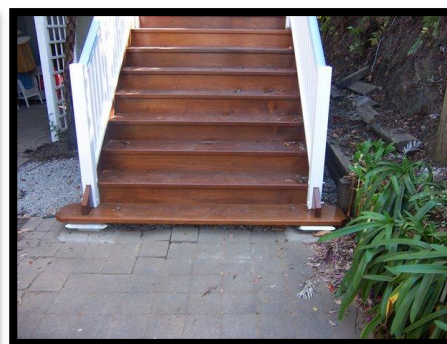
### **So many choices... So much to consider!**

Who would have thought that there could be so many choices and things to consider when installing a new staircase?!? The type of staircase you choose will ultimately have an impact on maintenance requirements and costs, so let's have a look at the different types of external stairs available:

- **Timber** – Staircases made of treated pine or hardwood products are the most typical types of external staircase. Stairs made from timber are often painted or stained, and can come in a variety of designs. For example, you may choose to have 'open treads' without risers, or 'closed treads' with riser boards. Open tread stairs are particularly suitable for external use because they allow for greater ventilation, which dramatically improves durability. Considering we live in humidity-central, this is a pretty handy design feature! Treated pine is much more cost effective than hardwood options (such as Merbau for example), because it is still well suited to all weather conditions and resistant to termites. Merbau is beautiful though... so if you have the extra money in your staircase budget, you can get yourself a stunning set of stairs that will not only look chic, but also withstand the test of time and weather for many years to come. Having said all of this, timber stairs require the most maintenance. As with timber decking, timber stairs will need to be painted or stained regularly (we recommend annually), and they also need to be treated for termites on a regular basis.



Painted timber with open treads



Stained timber with closed treads

- **Concrete/Rock/Stone** – These types of stairs are by far the most durable (for obvious reasons!) and also require the least maintenance. A good clean every once in a while using a high-pressure water cleaner is all that you really need to keep these stairs looking like new. But, this all comes at a price. Concrete or stone stairs are by far the most expensive, so it really does depend on your budget and also the look and feel of your property.



Stone steps



Concrete open tread stairs

- **Metal** – This material is a great compromise between expensive stone and high-maintenance timber. Wrought iron stairs tend to be quite popular, providing they fit with the look of the home. Maintenance is also pretty low key, especially if the metal doesn't require any painting.



Galvanised staircase and railing



Metal staircase with elaborate wrought iron spindles and railing

But, there are still lots of other things to choose when building or renovating your external stairs:

- **Finishing** – If you choose timber stairs, they will need to be “finished”, and while this is clearly for aesthetic reasons, it is definitely about more than just looking pretty. The main reason stairs need to be finished is to protect them from the elements and maximise their lifespan. Constant exposure to wet conditions and heat can lead to splitting, distortion and rotting. It is for this reason that choosing a high quality paint or oil is super important!
- **Fasteners** – Because an external staircase is, well... external, it means it is constantly exposed to the weather. The fasteners used on your external staircase must be hot dipped galvanised so they do not corrode. Fasteners are what keep the structure together, so again this is a really important element!
- **Railings** – This is where you can get really creative!! It doesn't matter what material you have chosen for your actual stairs... you can have whatever railings you like! Just remember that the railing and spindles also require maintenance on a regular basis.



Timber staircase and railing with metal spindles



Concrete stairs with wrought iron railing

Designing and choosing external stairs can be great fun and an excellent way to add character and function to your home, but be sure to check with your local Council if any building permits are required for the installation of new external stairs. Also, as with any projects around the home, don't forget to consider how the design and materials will ultimately affect maintenance and durability. If you look after your home, it will look after you!

Sources:

- *Wood Solutions*
- *Allwood Stairs*
- *Doityourself.com*

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