

Car Care Tips

A little TLC goes a long way.

You expect a lot out of your vehicle, and in return it needs a few things out of you. By regularly performing these simple cleaning and maintenance procedures, your vehicle will last longer and perform better. A “happy” vehicle will save you time, money and hassle in the long run. After all, you need your vehicle to keep your life moving!

Make Your Finish Last Longer

- Avoid washing your car in the sun.
- Rinse off as much dirt as possible before washing.
- Clean tires first.
- Clean wheels to eliminate brake dust and road salt corrosion.
- Never use household soaps or detergents.
- Don't place grocery bags, luggage or other objects on the car top or trunk.
- After driving in salty conditions, wash your car to prevent corrosion, fading and rust.
- Get a complete detail once a year.
- Do not "dry wipe" your car as it may cause scratching.
- Avoid extreme heat and cold by keeping your car parked in the shade or a garage.
- Avoid gravel roads, which can cause chipping in the first 30 days.
- Do not park under trees, which drip sap.
- Immediately rinse gasoline, oil, antifreeze, transmission fluid and windshield solvent spills off your finish--but do not wipe.

Car Care for All Seasons

- Use fresh air, instead of recirculated air, to keep your windows from fogging.
- Be sure to check your tire pressure regularly as tires deflate one pound of pressure for every 10 degrees the temperature drops.
- Run your air conditioner once a month to keep it in proper running order.
- Check battery monthly as cold weather can cause it to lose its charge more quickly.
- Check antifreeze regularly.
- Have ignition system checked yearly by a trained technician--including batteries and spark plug wires--to avoid hard starting, misfire during acceleration and reduced gas mileage.
- Have your cooling system checked once a year.
- When needed, flush, drain and replace antifreeze.
- Flush dirt, bugs and leaves from the front of your radiator with a brush and garden hose to prevent cooling system problems.
- Check battery weekly in hot weather and daily on long trips.

Car Maintenance Checklist

- Follow manufacturer's recommendations for oil and filter changes--typically every 3,000 to 4,000 miles.
- Replace engine oil, transmission fluid and fuel filters on a periodic basis.
- Schedule periodic engine tune-ups to keep car running smoothly.
- Take car to a technician at the first sign of trouble to avoid causing more costly damage.
- Vacuum out air cleaner housing and wipe with a damp rag before installing new air filter to keep dirt out of engine and maximize filter life.
- Check battery fluid regularly--especially if your battery is more than two years old.
- Periodically check tension on drive belts to ensure they do not give more than half an inch.
- Lubricate door hinges, door latches and hood hinges periodically.
- Have tires rotated and balanced at least every 10,000 miles.
- Check tire inflation once a month to maximize fuel efficiency and avoid accidents from under-inflated tires.
- Follow manufacturer's recommendations for coolant flush schedules on late model Ford, Lincoln and Mercury vehicles with V-6 and V-8 engines. Old coolant can cause expensive, internal corrosion around the water pump, timing cover and thermostat housing bolts.
- Sticking or noisy power steering columns on older cars can sometimes be fixed by adding 1/2 can of STP or similar additive. **DO NOT TRY THIS ON LATE MODELS OR EXPENSIVE VEHICLES.**
- Change your windshield wipers at least once a year.

Keeping Your Car Clean Outside

- Remove leaves from your car as soon as possible to prevent the release of acid that can permanently stain your finish.
- Avoid parking under trees that release sap. Or, to remove sap, use finger nail polish remover on a cotton ball. Use a paste of water and baking soda to wash off the remover, then apply wax.
- Avoid brush-style car washes as they cause dirt to scratch the car's finish.
- Use the lowest setting in do-it-yourself car washes to avoid "blasting" grit into the car's finish.
- Avoid washing your car in the sun.
- Avoid household detergents and soaps as they strip your car's protective surface causing the finish to dry out and age prematurely.
- Wash in straight lines with overlapping strokes to reduce the standing water you need to dry off.
- Clean tires first, then the wheels to prevent irreversible corrosion caused by brake dust and road salt.
- Be sure to wash the inside bottom edge of doors, lift gate, hood and trunk to eliminate the trapped dirt and moisture that can cause premature rusting.

- Never wax your car in direct sunlight to prevent the surface temperature of your car from causing the chemicals in the wax to damage your finish.
- Look for car wax which contains imported vegetable wax, which is safe for your car's finish.
- Avoid waxes that promise to remove dirt, oxidized paint or scratches as they are not pure wax and can actually remove paint from your vehicle.
- Do not "polish" light scratches as new car finishes have a clear coat finish that can be damaged.
- Mask off all textured moldings and bumper parts before rubbing on wax to avoid discoloring or other damage.
- Rinse off dirt prior to washing to prevent scratching from rubbing it into the surface.
- Rinse dirt from moving parts, such as suspension components.

Keeping Your Car Clean Inside

- Apply protectant with a rag and avoid spraying directly on the dash.
- Use a vinyl protectant regularly to prevent fading and cracking.
- Once vinyl protectant is applied, it will need to be re-applied regularly to prevent drying and cracking.
- Vinyl dashes can also be cleaned using Lemon Pledge, which leaves a nice smell, too.
- Vacuum regularly to remove dirt, salt, leaves and other items that can damage carpets and mats.
- Leather interiors should be cleaned with leather products--that are designed to penetrate the pores.
- For leather, avoid high-alkaline content which can bleach the color.
- Use only upholstery cleaners designed for cars, not household cleaners.