

FALL Car Care



Fall Driving Checklist

Make sure your car is ready for the seasonal changes ahead. It's a matter of safeguarding your vehicle, but also yourself, your passengers and others who might be out on the road in wintry conditions.

STAYING ON THE ROAD

Cold weather is particularly hard on car batteries because low temperatures slow the chemical reactions that produce electricity. If your battery is aging, or if your vehicle was slow to start during the summer, consider replacing it before winter arrives. If you're unsure about your battery's condition, many auto parts stores offer free battery testing.

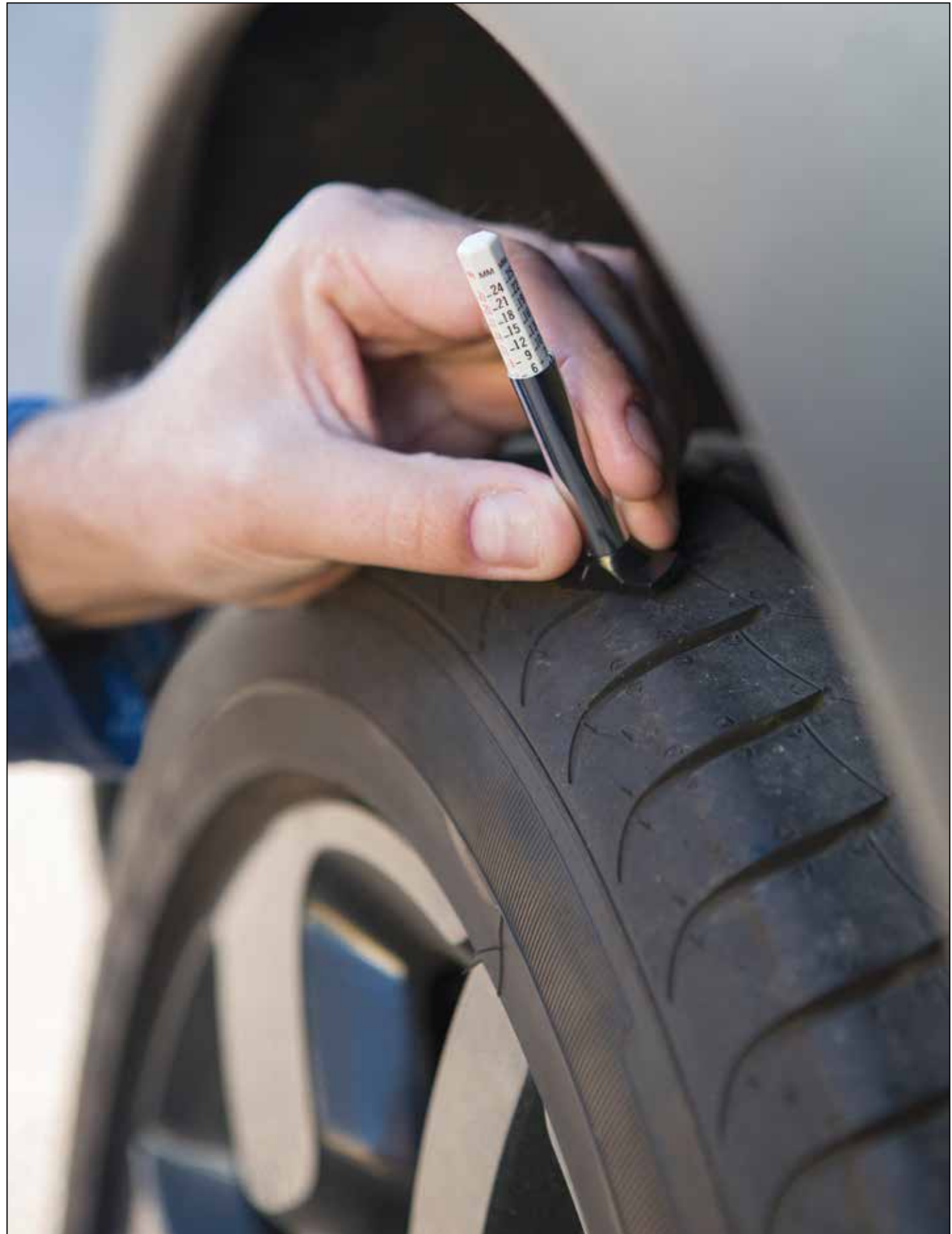
Tires also deserve extra attention before colder weather arrives. Adequate tire tread helps maintain traction on wet, snowy, and icy roads, while proper tire pressure supports safe handling and can improve fuel economy. Because tire pressure drops as temperatures fall, check it regularly throughout the season.

Winter weather can also take a toll on windshield wipers. Inspect the blades for signs of wear and replace them if they leave streaks or miss sections of the windshield. Before cold weather sets in, top off your windshield washer fluid and check your vehicle's other essential fluids. Most drivers can handle these simple maintenance tasks without a trip to a mechanic.

MAKING FIXES

Use a tread-depth gauge, or perform the familiar penny test as a quick screening tool. If the tread is approaching the top of Lincoln's head, consider replacing the tires before winter, when additional tread can improve traction on wet and snowy roads. The penny test approximates a 2/32 inch of tread. However, many safety organizations recommend replacing tires used in wet or snowy conditions well before they reach 2/32 inch because traction deteriorates significantly before then. A quarter test or measuring tread depth with a gauge provides more useful information.

Many newer vehicles monitor tire pressure and will alert you through the dashboard or a smartphone app if pressure drops. Even so, it's a good idea to check tire pressure periodically with a tire gauge, especially as temperatures begin to fall. If you don't own one, many air pumps at gas stations have a gauge on the nozzle. Check the sticker inside the driver's door or consult your owner's manual for the manufacturer's recommended tire pressure. For best testing results, check after your car or truck has been stationary for at least half an hour.



Don't Forget Your Lights

Your vehicle's lighting system has a lot of working parts.

Brake lights let those behind you know that you're slowing down, either because of traffic or a road hazard. Turn signals translate your intentions to other drivers. Daytime running lights help make your vehicle more visible to other drivers, while headlights become increasingly important as daylight hours shorten in the fall.

KEEP AN EYE OUT

Sometimes bulbs begin to fade before they go out completely. You might not immediately notice, particularly if you don't often drive at night. If they fail, however, you will find yourself suddenly having difficulty seeing the road ahead. A burned-out light can reduce visibility and make it harder for other drivers to see your vehicle. In many places, it can also result in a traffic stop or citation.

Many newer vehicles will notify you if an exterior bulb fails. Even so, it's still a good idea to perform a visual inspection before winter because some lighting issues may not trigger a warning.

Wait until dusk, when it's easier to see which lights are working. You'll need someone else to help by sitting in the vehicle and turning the lights on and off. Turn on the headlights and check the low beams, high beams, daytime running lights (if equipped), parking lights,



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brake lights, hazard flashers, turn signals, side marker lights, and the license plate light.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

With older models, owners could easily switch out a failing bulb and then get right back

on the road. That's not always the case today. Many newer vehicles use LED or HID lighting instead of traditional halogen bulbs. These systems generally last longer and provide brighter illumination, but repairs can be more complex and expensive.

Some vehicles require replacement of an entire light assembly, while others make bulb replacement difficult because of limited access. Depending on the design, the repair may be best left to a qualified technician. Check your owner's manual or call

the dealership to learn more about manufacturer recommendations. If you notice dim, flickering, or inoperative lights during your inspection, schedule repairs before winter weather and shorter days make good visibility even more important.

Prepare for the Unexpected

A roadside breakdown is never convenient, but colder weather can make an unexpected delay more challenging.

Whether you're waiting for roadside assistance or sitting through a weather-related traffic backup, a few simple preparations can make the experience safer and more comfortable.

BUILD AN EMERGENCY KIT

Keep a small emergency kit in your vehicle throughout the fall and winter. Include a warm blanket, flashlight, extra gloves or a hat, and a phone charging cable or portable battery pack. Shelf-stable snacks, such as granola bars or nuts, can also come in handy during a long delay.

If you frequently travel through areas that experience severe winter weather, consider packing additional cold-weather gear, such as boots, an extra layer of clothing, or traction aids. A snow brush and ice scraper are winter essentials in many parts of the country.

Carry bottled water, but remember that water left in a vehicle during freezing temperatures may freeze.

Leave room in the bottle for expansion or replace it as needed.



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STOCK A FIRST-AID KIT

A basic first-aid kit is useful year-round. Include adhesive bandages, gauze, antiseptic wipes, gloves, and any personal medications you may need.

Check the kit periodically and replace expired or used items.

BEFORE YOU HIT THE ROAD

Winter is a good time to review your emergency contacts and roadside assistance information. Save important phone numbers in your contacts, and keep your cellphone charged. Most vehicles include USB ports or other charging

options, so keeping a charging cable in your vehicle can ensure you can call for help if needed.

Finally, avoid letting your fuel tank get too low during colder months. If you're delayed by severe weather or waiting for assistance, having extra fuel allows you to run the heater

periodically while conserving fuel until help arrives.

If you become stranded during severe winter weather, remain with your vehicle whenever it is safe to do so. A vehicle is easier for emergency responders to locate than a person on foot and provides shelter from the elements.

Battling the Elements

Your vehicle's exterior faces year-round wear from sun, rain, road debris, bird droppings and other environmental hazards. Fall and winter introduce another challenge: road salt, slush and moisture that can accelerate corrosion.

STAYING ON SCHEDULE

Washing a car or truck can feel like more of a summertime ritual, but it's just as important to keep the exterior clean when you're not taking sunny afternoon drives. Accumulated road salt is a particular danger to the integrity of your lower fenders, bumpers and wheel wells. Wash your vehicle regularly during the winter, especially after driving on salted roads. Paying extra attention to the wheel wells and underbody can help remove salt before it contributes to corrosion. Consider occasional underbody washes if road salt is common in your area.

Rinse away loose dirt and road salt before washing to reduce the risk of scratching the paint. Use a car-wash soap formulated for automotive finishes rather than household detergents. Dry the vehicle with a microfiber towel or soft cloth to help prevent water spots.

LONG-TERM CARE

Waxing or sealing can create a protective layer against the harsh elements. Wax or apply a paint sealant according to the manufacturer's recommendations to help protect the finish from the elements. First, do a thorough clean-

ings. Otherwise, small pieces of debris can become trapped in the wax and cause damage to the vehicle's clear coating. Both waxes and paint sealants help protect a vehicle's finish. Follow the product's instructions for application and maintenance.

OTHER TIPS

If possible, park in a covered area or garage. This shields the vehicle from harsh elements and fading. If you use a car cover, choose one designed for your vehicle and use it on a clean vehicle to help avoid scratching the finish.

Pick a place to park where you can easily come and go in slippery conditions. Shade can help reduce sun exposure during warmer months, but avoid parking beneath trees during winter storms, when snow- or ice-laden branches may break.



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Organizing the Glove Box

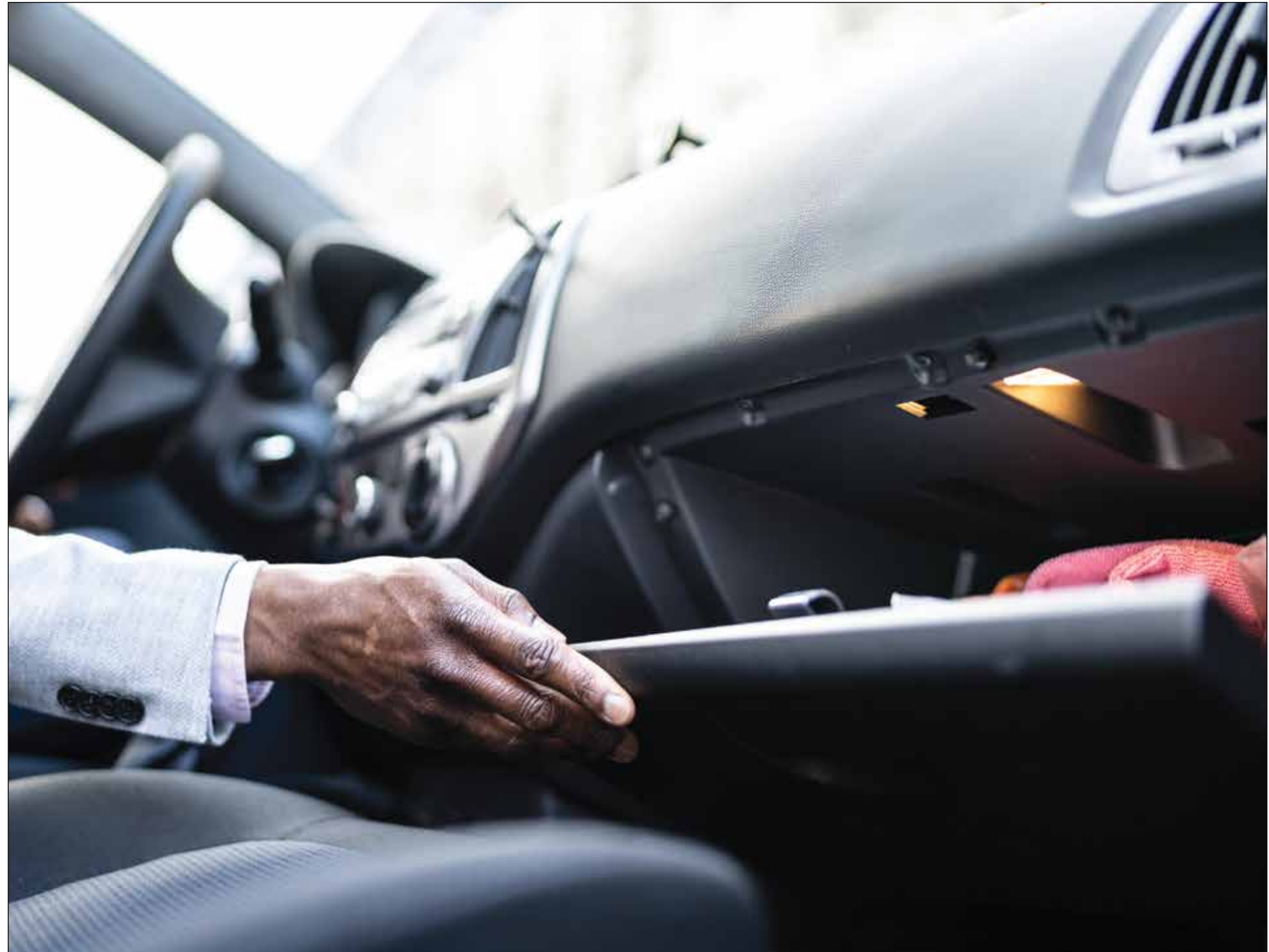
It can be hard to make time to keep everything organized — and that's often particularly true of your vehicle's glove box.

There are plenty of essential items usually found in them, from proof of insurance to the owner's manual. But there's a lot of junk sometimes, too, including things like extra napkins, crumpled receipts, ketchup packets, too many pens and maybe a few old compact discs. All signs of a summer well-lived but now gone. Now's the time to get back on track for the coming winter.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Aside from giving you a sense of organizational accomplishment, organizing your glove box could help lower your stress. After all, you don't want to end up digging around for key documentation after being in an accident or pulled over by law enforcement. An organized glove box gives you easier access to needed items like a tire gauge and the owner's manual when it's time to take care of regular maintenance.

Many people still keep proof of insurance inside the glove box, though many states accept electronic insurance cards and digital proof on your phone. If you keep the paper



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copies, make sure they are up to date. You'll need proof of registration, as well. Keep your title at home, however, in case the vehicle is stolen.

KEY ITEMS

The glove box is a useful place to keep key medical information. You may not

be able to communicate with emergency personnel after being in an accident and information about critical medications and allergies can help them make treatment decisions. Consider keeping emergency contact information in your phone using its emergency features. If you have sig-

nificant medical conditions or allergies, wearing a medical alert bracelet or carrying a medical information card can help first responders provide appropriate care.

Tuck maintenance and repair records inside the owner's manual so that you have a record of everything that's been

done. Plastic bags can come in handy for collecting any trash from inside the car. Keep a small flashlight in the glove box or emergency kit, even if your smartphone has a built-in flashlight. A dedicated light can be useful if you're trying to conserve your phone's battery.

A Smooth Cold-Weather Ride

Cold weather, rain, snow and potholes can all take a toll on your tires.

Before winter driving begins, take a few minutes to inspect them and make sure they're ready for the season.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Now is the time to prepare for the (bumpy) road again. Inspect your tires with an eye on replacing them, as needed. You'll be going a long way toward ensuring the safety of your passengers and those around you. As temperatures drop, tire pressure naturally decreases. Check tire pressure monthly during colder weather and adjust it according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Improperly inflated tires make it more difficult to brake and steer, creating the perfect situation for an accident. Worse, a blown tire in icy conditions can make a bad situation much, much worse. Properly maintained, unworn tires provide more traction, better breaking, better steering and longer tire life, while improving your fuel efficiency along the way.

Your vehicle's recommended tire pressure is listed on the driver's door-jamb placard or in the owner's manual.

ALIGNING AND ROTATION

We tend to overlook the importance of rotating and align-

ing tires, no matter the season. Rotate your tires according to your vehicle manufacturer's maintenance schedule, typically every 5,000 to 8,000 miles. Have the alignment checked if the vehicle pulls to one side, the steering wheel is off-center, you notice uneven tire wear, or after a significant impact with a pothole or curb. Check your owner's manu-

al for more information. The manufacturer may have different guidelines for your specific vehicle.

Rotating tires leads to a more even wear pattern. Proper alignment extends their life while also ensuring a better grip on the road. That's particularly important during the fall and winter seasons. If you strike a large pothole or curb,

inspect the tire for damage and have the vehicle's alignment checked if you notice vibration, pulling, or unusual tire wear. Tire balancing is often checked during rotation or whenever new tires are installed.

CLOSE INSPECTION

Regularly check your tires for cracks, bulges or embedded objects. Nails that aren't

obviously protruding can still cause a dangerous blowout in the future. If you see a defect or puncture, have the tire repaired as soon as possible. When replacing tires, follow your vehicle manufacturer's recommendations. Some all-wheel-drive vehicles require closely matched tire tread depths to help prevent drivetrain damage.



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Don't Forget Your Battery

One of the most important things that keeps your vehicle going is tucked away under the hood.

A healthy battery is essential for starting your vehicle, and cold weather can place additional strain on it.

HOW IT WORKS

Batteries naturally lose their charge over time. Add in fall and winter's cooler temperatures, and they can fail at the worst possible moment. Your battery provides the power to start the vehicle and run some accessories. (The alternator then provides continual power as your journey continues.)

Cold temperatures slow the chemical reactions inside the battery, reducing the amount of power it can deliver. At the same time, cold engines require more energy to start, making winter one of the most demanding seasons for a battery.

WHY THEY FAIL

Batteries lose their charge for a variety of reasons. The car may have been parked for too long or an interior light could have been inadvertently left on. They have a limited shelf life.

Sometimes, however, the problem isn't the battery's age or some mishap. Batteries with loose cables may degrade more quickly. Faulty wiring, malfunctioning interior elec-



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tronics or lights and bad fuses can drain your battery even when the vehicle isn't running.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Frequent short trips may not fully recharge the battery. Occasional longer drives can help maintain its charge, especially during colder weather.

This will naturally replenish the battery's energy. Before leaving your vehicle, make sure lights and other accessories are turned off. If your vehicle has accessories that continue drawing power while parked, follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Make sure the trunk, glove

box and doors are completely closed.

If you're going to store your vehicle for the winter, consider purchasing the modern-era wonder called a battery maintainer (sometimes called a trickle charger). Sold at most local auto-care stores, they provide low-level current that

replaces the need to regularly run the vehicle. The low-tech approach to extending battery life when the vehicle is not in use has always been to simply disconnect it. But that can wreak havoc with computer systems. You'll lose other settings, including radio presets, trip mileage and clocks.