

Spring Car Care



Preparing For Warmer Temps

Longer, sunnier days can put extra strain on your vehicle

“Winterizing” has become routine for many, while we often forget about the unique stresses presented by the seasons that follow.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Your vehicle's engine and related systems have unique needs when temperatures begin to rise. Every car or truck is different, depending on the type and size of engine, the age of the vehicle and where you live. Some climates are naturally more stressful because of temperature extremes. Consult your owners manual, follow recommended schedules and discuss any concerns with a trusted mechanic and service-department representative.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Begin with a pre-summer check of your cooling system before things heat up. Typically, these systems simply need a small adjustment like new fluids, but there may be larger issues at play due to aging equipment. Flush anti-freeze and then refill with season-specific fluids, carefully following manual recommendations. Keep a close eye on these levels throughout the warmer months. Next focus on any stalling or rough idling. You don't want to be stranded with a stopped engine on a shoulder in the heat.



© ADOBE STOCK

Inspect belts and hoses, or have them looked over by a qualified technician. Change the oil, as needed, to help protect key engine parts. If you do it yourself, be sure to properly dispose of any used oil afterward. Be sure that tires are properly inflated, and check the condition of your spare.

Make these checks after the car has had a chance to cool down. Replace any worn wiper blades in advance of spring showers. Make sure your lights are also in good running order.

LEAVING WINTER BEHIND

This time of year, giving

your vehicle's exterior a deep cleaning isn't just for appearance's sake. Grime from melted snow and corrosive road salt can do great damage if not removed in a timely fashion. Those who make use of winter tires should swap out for summer or all-season versions, which boast a rigidity that's

designed for better handling on hot road surfaces. While you're under there, consider rotating the tires so they will wear more evenly. It may also have a positive impact on your gas mileage. Finally, replace needed items in your emergency kit, since it may have been depleted over the winter.

Trust Your Nose

You might not need all of the sophisticated equipment used by mechanics

Key identifying odors can alert you to larger problems with a vehicle, if you're willing to rely on your nose as a diagnostic device. These are the specific smells to look out for, as outlined by the Car Care Council:

BURNING RUBBER OR CARPET

Burned rubber smells could point to loose drive belts, or loose hoses under the hood. Pulleys may also be in contact with engine parts. Burned carpet smells are typically associated with brake issues. Be prepared to take care of this right away if you're smelling this while under typical driving conditions.

HOT OIL OR GASOLINE

Oil leaking onto hot engine parts like the exhaust system will produce a very pungent smell. Look for oil under your vehicle wherever you park, and watch for smoke emitting from the engine compartment while driving or when your vehicle is cooling down after a drive. You should never smell gas during normal operation of a car or truck. This smell could indicate a leak which you might find in the fuel tank or injector line. Take the vehicle to a mechanic or service



© ADOBE STOCK

center immediately, since gas is such a dangerous fire hazard.

PAPER ON FIRE OR MUSTY BASEMENT

If you smell something that reminds you of paper on fire when changing gears, have your clutch inspected. The facing may be coming off

when the clutch slips, a situation that's caused or made worse when drivers keep the clutch partially engaged or use it too frequently. The entire clutch is at risk of failure. If a musty smell begins to emit from your air conditioner or heater, you likely have a mildew issue in the system's evaporator. Turn off the cool-

ing or heating and proceed with the fan on high in order to dry everything out.

SYRUP OR ROTTEN EGGS

Engine coolant leaks lead to a sweet scent that you may associate with the breakfast syrup used for pancakes or waffles. Inspect around the vehicle's cooling system;

often, this issue is resolved with a new hose but occasionally there are larger issues that must be dealt with. The smell of rotten eggs, on the other hand, could point to problems with your catalytic converter. You'll also generally notice that the engine has been running poorly when this happens.

Getting Into Alignment

Problems in this area can impact gas mileage, tire wear and control

Pay close attention if the vehicle begins to veer to one side while you're driving. That's a signal that something is wrong.

Your car or truck will need re-alignment any time a tire or tires are replaced, but vehicles can also become misaligned after every day mishaps, like hitting a pothole. This isn't typically the kind of job that just anyone can handle. So, get in contact with a qualified service provider or your dealership representative about scheduling an appointment.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The average tire is meant to last up to 70,000 miles or so, with proper care and regularly scheduled maintenance, according to Consumer Reports. You will be faced with costly replacements much sooner, in particular if you drive for long distances with a misalignment. You'll also notice a decline in gas efficiency, and may have trouble steering since the wheels aren't in proper contact with the pavement. Fixing the issue doesn't take long, and it isn't generally too expensive. But this process requires a lift for the vehicle and special diagnostic equipment that the average person doesn't usually have on hand, even those who consider themselves ace



© ADOBE STOCK

shade-tree mechanics.

HOW IT'S DONE

Wheel alignment professionals will place your vehicle on a specially designed lift in order to get the wheels off the ground for inspection. Next, they'll use sensors to determine the exact required angle of your wheels and then adjust

the suspension system until these detailed specifications are met. Three angles are measured and then possibly adjusted, depending on your vehicle's specific issue, including camber (vertical alignment), caster (steering pivot point) and toe (inward or outward angles). They may also deal with worn ball joints,

bearings and other suspension parts if they prove to be the cause of your misalignment.

WHEN IT'S NECESSARY

Be on the watch for uneven tire wear, vehicles with a tendency to pull to the right or left, a steering wheel that's off center when you are traveling into a straight line, and gener-

ally annoying steering-wheel vibrations. The front end of a car or truck may also shake after hitting a bump. Manufacturers don't generally recommend a timeframe or specific mileage for regular realignment. Instead, schedule one when any of these issues becomes apparent — or when replacing your tires.

Wax On, Wax Off

Your vehicle deserves to look its very best under the spring-time sun

Whether you choose synthetic polymer-based or spray-on versions, the result will be a shinier look with built-in protection to sharpen and extend the life of your paint job.

How often you need to wax is based on where you park. A good wax job may last as long as three months for those with a garage, while vehicles that are left outside in the elements must be waxed on a far more regular basis.

Spray waxes allow for a quicker, easier application but are usually far less durable than paste or liquid waxes. They're best used as a boost between more in-depth wax jobs.

WHAT TO DO

First, make sure you have a proper waxing agent, not a polish or glaze. Glazes are meant to fill in minor imperfections or scratches, while polishes are more abrasive and are used to remove small blemishes. Neither provides the same protection, so if you use them keep in mind that you'll still need to wax. Begin by giving your vehicle a deep wash, and then completely drying it. Apply wax with small, circular strokes using a pad. Focus on one section at a time. After using one side of the pad to apply, flip it over to remove additional residue.



© ADOBE STOCK

USING MICROFIBER

The gentlest product for this process is a microfiber pad or towel. Use them for both drying and waxing, since they won't scratch the surface or mar your finish like typical scratchier fabrics. Follow their specific washing instructions and these microfiber

products will last longer. Always wash them separately from other laundry, using hot water, and then dry with low heat.

ADDED PROTECTION

Beyond looking great, a properly waxed vehicle boasts a tougher outer layer which

provides a number of added protections. For instance, car wax helps block the sun's UV rays. Over time, this harmful light can cause differing shades and spot development in your paint job. Dried bird droppings can permanently stain your paint, while exterior parking can also lead to

dust build up. Wax coatings create a slippery layer that makes it harder for both to stick to your vehicle. Dampness and moisture can also be a concern, and this extra layer fights their corrosive properties by causing water to bead and then evaporate more quickly.

Jump Starting a Battery

Unfortunately, a battery can give out at the worst possible time

That's why it's important to have a good working knowledge of how they function, and how to get them going again so you're not left stranded with a car that won't run.

WHAT TO DO

If your car won't start, turn off the lights, the air conditioner or heater, and all other electronics before attempting to jump start the car. Remove the terminal cover and any corrosion before attaching the red/positive cable to the corresponding terminal on the dead battery, and then repeating this action on the assisting battery. Pay close attention to the order of these connections, since that's the most common cause of unsuccessful battery jump starts. Make sure the clamps are in firm contact.

Attach the black/negative cable to the assisting battery and the other end to an exposed metal portion of the disabled vehicle's engine compartment, away from the battery. Be especially careful not to attach it near the carburetor. Start the assisting vehicle, and then the disabled vehicle. Let both of them idle for three minutes, then disconnect. The jump-started vehicle should run for about a half hour in order to fully recharge the battery. If the battery dies again after jump starting, it likely



© ADOBE STOCK

needs to be replaced entirely.

DANGERS INVOLVED

Batteries may contain sulfuric acid, or produce oxygen and hydrogen gases that could explode on contact with a spark. The National Safety Council confirms that eye injuries are the most common

issue with batteries mishaps, due to escaping acid or battery fragments. Thousands of people become injured, and some are even blinded, according to the Sight and Hearing Association. That's why your car's emergency kit should include some sort of eye protection, for those times when

you need to check, jump start, clean or replace your battery.

Other common injuries include burns, painful skin irritation and even scarring. The lung's mucous membranes may be damaged when fumes are inhaled, and ingested acids can result in death because of injury to internal organs.

Check your car battery regularly for any damage or wear. Buy and carry jumper cables that are color coded, at least 12-feet long and approved and tested by the Society of Automotive Engineers. Along with safety glasses, pack along a flashlight and, if needed, a handy guide for jump-starting a battery.

Time To Flush the Antifreeze?

Your vehicle's engine relies upon this critical fluid as the seasons change

Coolant is often used interchangeably with antifreeze, but they are not the same. Here's a look at the key differences and when you should consider flushing your engine:

Flushing a system and replacing the antifreeze used to be a standard practice of maintenance, but more modern systems can go 100,000 miles before a complete turn-over is recommended. In some cases, manufacturers say you may never require new coolant.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

As the name suggests, antifreeze was originally designed for the season that just passed. It's made with ethylene or propylene glycol as the basic ingredient. Coolant is created when antifreeze is mixed with water. Usually this is a 50/50 mix, but it may contain as much as 70 percent antifreeze for vehicles operating in extreme cold.

Be careful if you decide to top off or replace coolant. Make sure you're buying the correct blend for your vehicle. Antifreeze comes in a variety of colors which indicate the type and specific use, from green and orange to pink. Some use organic acid or inorganic acid technology, while others are a hybrid. They should be mixed with water, but never together.



© ADOBE STOCK

Check your vehicle owners manual for guidance. Do not remove a radiator cap when the engine is hot because this system operates under pressure and coolant temps inside soar to over 200 degrees.

HOW IT WORKS

Coolant settles into the radi-

ator when the engine is off. As it begins to run, the fluid is pumped into the engine in order to absorb heat, then goes back through the radiator where it is cooled again by fresh air. Then the circulation continues. When your vehicle's heater is on, some of the coolant diverts to the core of that

unit. This fluid is warmed there, and then a fan sends the air into the passenger cabin.

WHAT'S AT RISK

Water alone can't sufficiently cool an engine, or protect it against freezing — and it can also rust sensitive parts. Water boils at 212 degrees and also

freezes at 32 degrees. A 50/50 coolant blend allows engines to run at more than 200 degrees, while preventing freezing at 30 below zero or lower. An overheating engine can suffer warped parts. Liquid also expands as it freezes, which can crack engine parts or the block.

Windshield Maintenance

They're your window to the world — and a key safety feature

Dirty windshields can make it difficult to navigate, potentially putting your vehicle (or maybe your life) at risk. Obstructions may include grime, build up of bugs or — worst of all — cracks in the glass itself.

In the latter case, an errant sun flare or passing headlights can cause a dangerous refraction that can blind a driver. Here's a look at how to care for your windshield:

REGULAR CARE

Wash your car — with an emphasis on the windshield — regularly to prevent the kind of build ups that obscure your vision. Scrape away ice and snow, then defrost your windshield before turning on the windshield wipers. The rubber blades tend to stick in these icy conditions, and that will wear them down prematurely — or, in some cases, break them off entirely.

Pay close attention to the blades, and replace them as soon as signs of wear begin to become apparent. You don't want them to fail during a sudden or persistent spring storm. The most common issue is a breakdown of the rubber itself, though sometimes the issue may be mechanical. Experts recommend replacing both windshield wipers at the same time. Those who aren't confi-



© ADOBE STOCK

dent in their ability to make this regular fix should contact local auto-parts stores or service-center associates. In some cases, installation is free with purchase.

DANGEROUS CRACKS

A errant pebble can end up creating a huge headache as

the extreme cold of winter evolves into the warming spring. Vibrations from normal driving can also make cracks around these small chips spread across your windshield. Left unattended, these cracks can create a very hazardous spider web-like pattern.

If caught early enough, you

can sometimes halt this process with repair kits for windshield cracks sold at most auto-parts stores and big-box outlets. You'll use acrylic adhesive and filler to fill in the small chips. If the damage is more severe, or if cracks have already begun to spread, contact a local auto-glass

shop. In many cases, these shops have mobile service options where the technician will fix the windshield at your home or business. Best of all, a number of car insurance companies offer packages that cover this service, since it's so critical to safely operating your vehicle.