



Spring Car Care

Caring for a Cooling System

Spring brings warmer temperatures not only outside but also for your car's engine. Your vehicle's coolant system distributes the engine's heat evenly throughout the car, preventing damage to the engine and other components.

Here's what you need to do to keep your car running smoothly and coolly.

CHANGE YOUR COOLANT

Change your car's coolant regularly. If it's been a while or if you mixed coolants, you may need to have a professional flush it. There are three types of coolant (also called antifreeze), each a different mix of antifreezes and anti-corrosive factors. They are typically green, blue, yellow or orange. Each mixture is meant to address the specific requirements of a certain engine; it's best to use the fluid called for in your owner's manual. That said, here's what each color means.

- **Green:** This is the traditional, inorganic acid antifreeze that was once used in all cars and is still used in cars made before about the mid 1990s. These need a change every two years or every 25,000-30,000 miles.

- **Orange:** Organic acid anti-



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freezes don't have phosphates or silicates, but still have long-acting anti-corrosive agents that can protect the aluminum and nylon parts in newer cars. They must be replaced every three to five years and while we marked them as orange, they can be blue or other colors, depending on the manufacturer.

- **Yellow:** Hybrid organic acid antifreezes are the latest products on the market and are also called global antifreeze products. The label may say something about meeting or exceeding G-05 specifications. These fluids need to be changed every five years, and while they're usually dyed yellow, they can also

be purple or pink or another color. Always read the label to ensure you're purchasing the correct product.

Never mix different types of coolant.

KEEP THE RADIATOR IN GOOD ORDER

The radiator uses the car's water pump to disperse heat

throughout the vehicle's system, reducing the chance of overheating. Make sure the radiator cap is on tight and check it regularly to make sure it hasn't slipped. Just make sure the engine is cool before you touch it; the cap can get hot. And stand back. Unscrewing the cap may release pressure in the system.

How to Check Your Tires

Properly inflated tires with enough tread on them are critically important to driving safely.

Check your tires regularly, at least once a month, and before going on any long road trips. Properly inflated tires affect braking, steering and can ensure you're getting the best gas mileage.

INSPECT YOUR TIRES

Michelin says all you need to inspect your tires yourself is a penny and a few minutes. The penny should be one with Abraham Lincoln on it. Hold Abe's body between your thumb and forefinger. Choose a point on your tire where the tread appears the lowest and pop Abe's head into the groove. If any part of his head is covered by the tread, you're OK. Below that, and you need to look into a new set.

INFLATING YOUR TIRES

Part of a good tire inspection is to check your tire's pressure. You can do this with a tool or your vehicle may have a light on the dash that indicates low pressure. Refer to the owners' manual or the plate inside the glove box door, driver's side door frame, fuel filler flap or trunk lid.

Don't go by the pressure on the tire's sidewall. That's the pressure needed to meet the tire's full-rated load capacity,



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not the pressure for your vehicle. Check your tire pressure before driving while the tires are still cool. If you have to check them when they are hot or after use, remember that a 2-6 psi higher reading is normal for hot tires.

Also remember that the weather can affect your car's tire pressure reading. If the light comes on, check the pressure in all four tires, especially if you've had a change in temperature recently. Keep a quality tire

gauge in your car for this purpose and drive as little as possible on underinflated tires.

ROTATING YOUR TIRES

Regularly rotate your car's tires to new positions on the vehicle. Each vehicle has its

own recommendations, but it's typically every 5,000 miles. It's usually done when you get your oil changed. Rotating your tires spreads wear evenly across all four tires, maximizing tread life and improving performance.

Car Air Filters Explained

Your car, just like you, needs to breathe fresh, clean air for it to work properly.

The vehicle may have two air filters, one for the engine and one for the cabin. Here's how each works.

ENGINE AIR FILTER

The engine air filter prevents your engine from being damaged by dirt and other contaminants. A clogged air filter can cause your car to misfire or have black smoke coming from the exhaust. Change your engine air filter every 30,000-45,000 miles, or more frequently if you drive in dusty or hot climates.

A clogged engine air filter may cause your check engine light to come on, and it may negatively affect your gas mileage and engine components. It may also increase pollution coming from your vehicle. If you live in an area where you must get your car emissions tested, this could cause you to fail the test.

CABIN AIR FILTER

The cabin air filter works with the air conditioning system to provide clean air to the passengers of the car. It should be changed every two or three years, generally speaking, but could be more often if you drive in dusty environments, have sensitive allergies or live in a big city.

You can tell when it's time for a change when you have



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problems with your air conditioner or notice strange smells.

CHANGING THE AIR FILTERS

Both engine and cabin air filters are usually pretty easy to change and it may be a job you can do yourself.

The air filter for your engine is located under the

hood. You should have instructions in your owner's manual for changing the filter, but here's a general guide. Start by finding the air filter box and open it by releasing latches or tabs. Some boxes need a screwdriver or socket set, so have one handy in case you need it. Remove the old filter and any accompanying debris. Note how it went in so

that you can put the new filter in the same way.

Install the new filter matching the direction and placement of the old filter. Close the housing and secure it how it was before. You're all done.

The cabin air filter is usually behind a car's glove compartment. You may need a screwdriver to access it. Some other models have the cabin

air filter under the hood. See your owner's manual for instructions.

Remove the old filter and any debris. Clean out the housing and install the new filter in the direction of the old filter.

Air flow direction is usually marked by arrows on the filter. Reinstall the glove box and close everything up.

Extended Warranty Basics

Most new cars come with a factory warranty of three years or 36,000 miles that covers defective parts or flaws in workmanship. However, you can buy an additional warranty to protect your budget from repair costs.

Here are some tips from MarketWatch for buying an extended warranty.

NOT ALL WARRANTIES ARE CREATED EQUAL

Not all extended warranties cover everything. You can opt for a bumper-to-bumper warranty, which covers just about everything in your car. A powertrain warranty is more bare bones, covering only repairs to the engine, transmission, drive axles and transfer case. You can get a hybrid option — often called stated-component coverage — to cover powertrain plus other components.

DEALERSHIP WARRANTIES

Dealership warranties are sold at car dealerships at the time of purchase. They usually only allow repairs at one of the brand's own repair facilities. For instance, if it's a Ford truck, repairs can be done



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only at other Ford dealerships. You may have fewer options at the dealership when it comes to stated-component coverage and car parts used. Dealership warranties often only cover OEM components.

AFTERMARKET WARRANTIES

Aftermarket warranties are purchased directly from the warranty company. Repairs can usually be done at any

shop certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. Depending on the vehicle, you may have more options for stated-component coverage and terms, and the plan may also allow for generic parts.

COST

MarketWatch says extended warranties typically cost between \$1,500 and \$4,000, depending on several factors.

Dealership warranties come from the dealership, usually at the time of purchase, while aftermarket warranties can be purchased at any time directly from the company. You might be able to get more flexible payment terms and coverage options from the aftermarket.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Aside from cost and what's covered, look at the deduct-

ible amount. Generally speaking, the lower the deductible, the higher the premium and vice versa, just like with insurance. Check companies' reputations online and with the Better Business Bureau. Read customer reviews and ask your friends and family members for recommendations. As always, carefully read the contract, including the fine print, before signing on the dotted line.

Get Your Car Smelling Fresh

After a long, mucky winter of mud and wet boots, your car may have acquired a new fragrance. Get it springtime fresh again with these few steps.

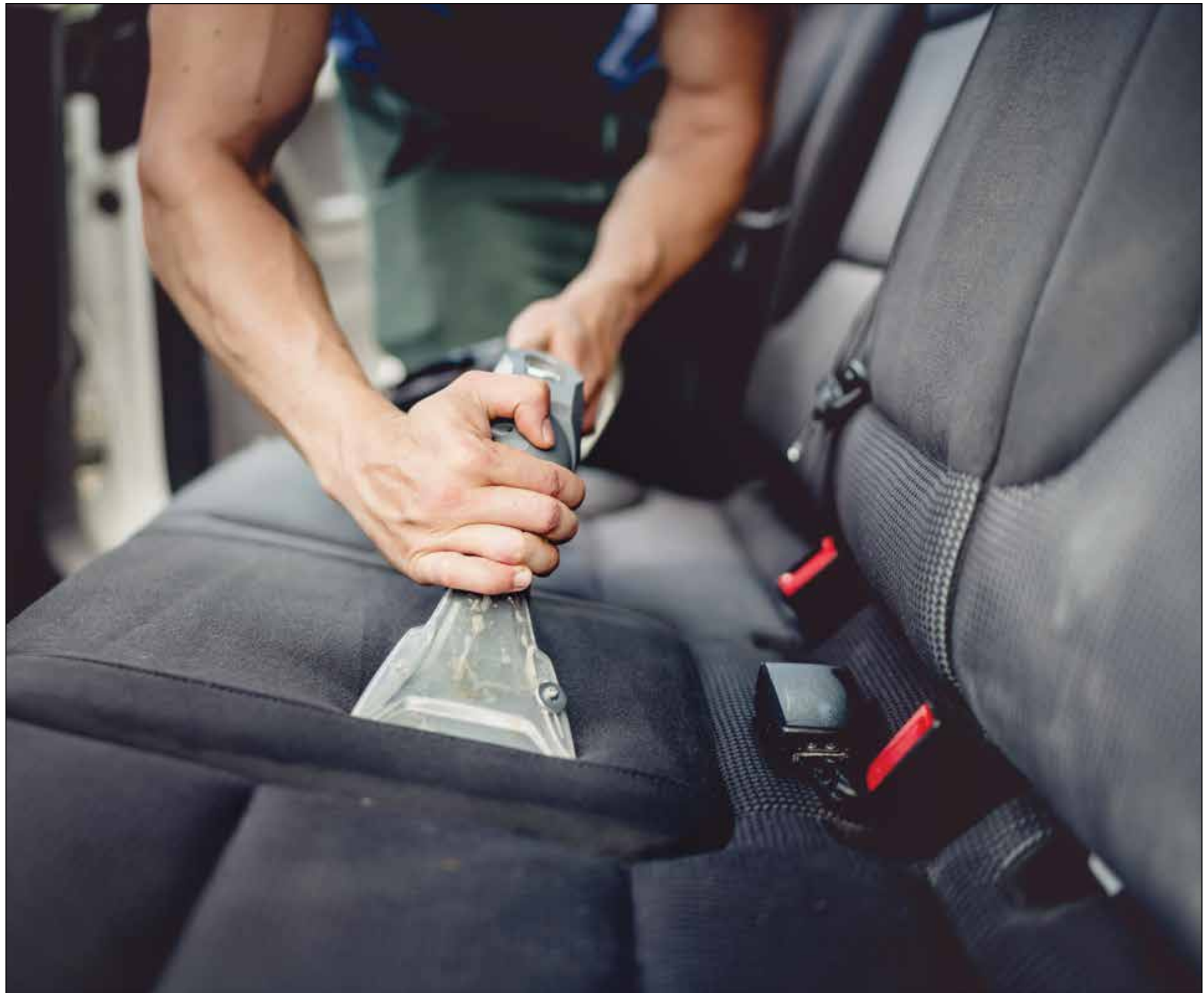
1. Clean your air vents. Use a small brush or a vacuum cleaner and crevice tool to get all the dirt and debris out of your air vents.

2. Use baking soda. Baking soda is a natural odor absorber. Sprinkle it on your upholstery and carpets, let it sit for a few hours, then vacuum it up. For tough odors, place a bowl or open box of baking soda in the car overnight.

3. Use an air freshener. Choose a scent that you enjoy and a method of deployment: spray, plug-in, vent clip, visor clip, sachet. Don't use too much and avoid fresheners with harsh chemicals.

4. Air it out. As soon as weather permits, open up the windows and go for a drive to circulate fresh air and get rid of musty odors.

5. Clean it up. Clean up any spills, especially food and drink, which tend to turn into mold. Clean the floor mats by shaking them to remove loose dirt then vacuum them and use a carpet cleaner to remove stains. Wipe down the interior with a vinegar and water spray to get rid of stubborn odors. Your car may smell like vinegar for a while, but once it dissi-



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pates, so will any other unpleasant smells.

6. Clean the trunk. Don't forget to clean your car's cargo spaces, too. Remove everything, vacuum it out, and toss in a bag of charcoal to absorb odors.

7. Change the cabin air filter. Many new cars have a cabin air filter. Check your owner's manual to find the instructions for replacing it and how often it should be replaced. If bad smells are

plaguing your ride, you may want to change it no matter your mileage. The good news is that it's generally an easy fix that you can do yourself.

8. Clean and condition the leather. If you've got leather

upholstery, you can start by cleaning and conditioning your leather. Not only will it get rid of any smelly grime, these products often come with a leathery smell that will chase off any other offensive odors.

Maintenance Schedules

Every car comes with a maintenance schedule outlined in the owner's manual.

Following that timeline can keep your car running smoothly.

While every make and model is different, here are some general rules for car maintenance, following a 30-60-90 maintenance schedule.

REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Change your oil and oil filter depending on your mileage, usually every 5,000, but maybe anywhere between every 3,000 and 10,000 miles. Check the engine oil on a regular basis, and keep an eye on your tires.

30,000 MILE MAINTENANCE

Your car shouldn't require any major repairs, but your air and fuel filters may need changing. The mechanic will probably check or change your oil and top off your fluids. Your technician should check and top off all your fluids as well as do an inspection of lights, tires and more.

60,000 MILE MAINTENANCE

This service should at least check and probably replace your battery, brakes and brake fluid, transmission fluid, coolant, brake rotors and more, along with air and fuel filters



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again. Your technician should check and top off all your fluids as well as do an inspection of lights, tires and more.

90,000 MILE MAINTENANCE

This is a pretty invasive service and includes the air and fuel filters as well as replacing power steering fluid, hoses, timing belts and spark plugs.

Again, this will probably come with an oil change as well as a multi-point inspection of all your vehicle's systems.

CAVEATS

While this is an example of a 30-60-90 schedule, each manufacturer has its own recommended schedule. Furthermore, how and where you drive is a huge factor in

how often you need maintenance and what kind of maintenance you need.

Your best bet is to have a schedule but also to have a great relationship with a local automotive repair professional who takes a regular look at your car at least once every calendar year if they aren't handling regular oil changes and other maintenance for you.

Make sure to keep any receipts for service and warranty information so that you can look back and see when repairs and maintenance were done. This may help with a warranty repair later. Missing a service or having an incorrect service, however, may void your warranty altogether. Your dealer or auto repair professional can help you.

Maintaining Your Car's Paint

The paint is probably the most visible part of your vehicle. Keeping it looking shiny and new is important to keeping your car looking good and to maintaining its value.

Paint also protects the car from rust and other damage to the frame of the vehicle. Here's how to keep it in tip-top shape.

WASH YOUR CAR

Dirt and grime doesn't just look bad, it can also degrade your paint's finish. Wash your vehicle regularly. Be careful not to use a pressure jet or cleaner that's too strong and can damage the paint.

PICKING THE RIGHT WAX

Waxing can help preserve the car's finish, but using the wrong wax can actually take the paint off of a car.

Dark-colored vehicles are more prone to scratching or swirling due to wax. Make sure the wax you choose is safe for clear-coat finishes.

USE PAINT CONDITIONER

Paint conditioner adds oils to the paint, taking out fine scratches and swirls while leaving behind a glossy shine. Follow the product instructions carefully and use either a yellow wool pad or a blue or black foam pad.



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PARK IN THE SHADE

Always try to leave your car in a shady spot, whether it's your garage or under a tree in a parking lot. The sun's ultraviolet rays can fade and oxidize your car's paint. If you can't park in the shade, consider using a car cover. You can get a universal car cover that's water

resistant but breathable for much less than a new paint job.

FIX SCRATCHES AND DENTS

Fix scratches and dents as soon as you can, especially if you can see bare metal underneath the paint. Exposing the bare metal leaves your car vul-

nerable to rust, which can be exacerbated by things such as compounds used on winter roads or salty air if you live near the ocean.

USE A PAINT PROTECTION FILM

This is a thin thermoplastic urethane film that goes over

the vehicle's paint, protecting it against stone chips, bugs, scratches and UV rays. Some films have self-healing properties, which can take out minor blemishes over time. A major downside is cost; PPF can run thousands of dollars, but can be well worth it for peace of mind.