

Seasonal Maintenance

Post-Winter Car Care

Congratulations! You survived another winter. And now that you're putting your winter coat back into mothballs until next winter, why not take the time to do some post-winter clean up on your vehicle as well?

Your automobile takes everything winter hands it ... torrential downpours, freezing rain, and even mountains of snow. So, it makes sense to get it ready for warmer weather.

Start with your tires, even if you drive on "all season" tires. Heavy, consistent snow and ice require snow tires, which absolutely should be replaced with the non-snow variety. Snow tires are more expensive than standard tires and are designed with special tread for added traction in icy and snow-packed conditions. Heavily treaded tires wear out faster and should be saved for next winter. If you drive on all season radials, this is the time to rotate them. The drive wheels will wear more quickly, especially under winter driving conditions. By rotating them seasonally, you extend the life of the set.

Windshield wiper blades also take a beating during winter weather. Cold temperatures are hard on rubber compounds, and they are assailed with slush kicked up by traffic. This slush often carries with it corrosive salt used to melt road ice, which can do a number on your blades.



Early spring is a good time to check and replace them if necessary. Check your windshield fluid as well since there's a good chance winter's dirt has exhausted the reservoir.

Next, clean your vehicle's underbody. There's no magic solution to getting rid of the corrosive salt build-up but the best tool is a high-pressure sprayer. Pay special attention to the area around the front and rear bumpers.

Once you've thoroughly sprayed the underbody, check for signs of rust and take the necessary steps to stop any small rust spots from eating away at your vehicle. We've all seen those pillars of snow that form around bumpers and wheel wells. That's the most likely place for road salt to begin the erosion process. While you're at it, you might as well wash the whole car. Winter is not conducive to leisurely afternoons spent hosing off your vehicle and chances are it's been a while.

Examine your brakes. Like wipers, brakes take on a bigger role during wintertime and should be checked to ensure that they've survived. Listen for brake noises such as grinding, chatter, or squeals. Even if your brakes aren't making any distinctive noises, it's still a good idea for you or your mechanic to determine the amount of wear on the pads or drums. We often become accustomed to the feel of worn brakes, without realizing that what we're used to is a deteriorated ability to stop.

Check all automotive fluids and top off as necessary. Winter driving conditions require your engine to work harder and deplete fluid levels faster. Some heavy winter drivers change their oil, opting for a thinner weight. Once you feel certain you've seen the last of consistently low temperatures, change back to an oil weight such as 10W/30 (or whatever is recommended in the owner's manual), formulated for warmer temperatures.

Go over the interior of your vehicle. This includes taking out and washing floor liners. Vacuum and clean the carpets, and make sure they are dry before you put the liners back in.

Now you're ready for warmer temperatures. Of course, soon you will need to prepare your vehicle for the long hot summer that's right around the corner.



For more information about Making Sense of Car Care, contact your local AAA club, a AAA Approved Auto Repair facility or visit AAA.com.

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Important safety information: Due to the complex nature of today's vehicles, it is essential that you use the utmost care when working on your car or truck. Before attempting any service or repair, consult your owner's manual. Be sure you understand the service procedure completely, have the proper tools, and adhere to all safety precautions, including handling instructions for any chemicals you are using. If you are unsure about any repair, consult a professional technician.



**MAKE SENSE
OF CAR CARE!**



Summer Car Care

Summer's heat, dust, and stop-and-go traffic, will take a toll on your vehicle. You can lessen the odds of mechanical failure through periodic maintenance.

Some of the following tips are easy to do; others will require a skilled auto technician.

- **Air Conditioning** – A system that is operating marginally will most likely fail in hot weather. That's why it's a good idea to have the system examined by a qualified technician.
- **Cooling System** - The greatest cause of summer breakdowns is overheating. The cooling system should be flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. Remember – Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has cooled! You can check the coolant but the tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

- **Oil** - Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual—more often (every 3,000 miles) if you make frequent short jaunts, extended trips with lots of luggage, or tow a trailer.



- **Engine Performance** - Replace other filters (air, fuel, PCV, etc.) as recommended – more frequently in dusty conditions. Get engine drivability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a reputable repair shop.
- **Windshield Wipers** - A dirty windshield causes eye fatigue and can pose a safety hazard. Replace worn blades and make sure you have plenty of windshield washer solvent on hand.
- **Lights** - Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean dirt and insects from all lenses. To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.
- **Tires** - Have your tires rotated about every 5,000 miles. Check the tire pressure once a month when the tires are cold, to get a

true reading. Don't forget to check your spare as well and be sure the jack is in good condition. Examine tires for tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. An alignment is warranted if there is uneven tread wear or if your vehicle pulls to one side.

- **Brakes** - Brakes should be inspected as recommended in your owner's manual, or sooner if you notice pulsations, grabbing, noises, or longer stopping distance. Correct minor brake problems promptly.
- **Battery** - Batteries can fail any time of year. The accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care can help make your battery last longer. Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check the fluid level monthly. Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.

Pre-Winter Car Care

Mechanical failure – an inconvenience anytime it occurs – can be deadly in the winter. Preventive maintenance is a must. Some of the following tips can be performed by any do-it-yourselfer; others require the skilled hands of a professional auto technician.

- **Engine Performance** - Get engine drivability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a good repair shop. Cold weather makes existing problems worse. Replace dirty filters—air, fuel, etc.
- **Fuel** - Put a bottle of fuel de-icer in your tank once a month to help keep moisture from freezing in the fuel line. Note that a full gas tank helps keep moisture from forming.
- **Oil** - Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual—more often (every 3,000 miles) if your driving is mostly stop-and-go or consists of frequent short trips.
- **Cooling Systems** - The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. (A 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water is usually recommended.)

Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled! The tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

- **Windshield Wipers** - Replace old blades. If your climate is harsh, purchase rubber-clad (winter) blades to fight ice build-up. Stock up on windshield washer solvent and carry an ice-scraper.
- **Heater/Defroster** - The heater and defroster must be in good working condition for passenger comfort and driver visibility. Newer models have a cabin air filter that should be checked and replaced as needed. Check your owner's manual for the location and replacement interval.
- **Battery** - The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check fluid level monthly. Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.
- **Lights** - Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean road grime from all lenses. To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.
- **Exhaust System** - Your vehicle should be placed on a lift and the exhaust system examined for leaks. The trunk and floorboards should be inspected for small holes. Exhaust fumes can be deadly.
- **Tires** - Worn tires will be of little use in winter weather. Examine tires for remaining tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. Check tire pressures once a month. Check the tires when they are cold, before driving for any distance. Rotate as recommended. Don't forget your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition.
- **Carry emergency gear:** gloves, boots, blankets, flares, a small shovel, sand or kitty litter, tire chains, and a flashlight. Put a few "high-energy" snacks in your glove box.

