

Cleaning your car

With new car prices skyrocketing, many people are holding onto their cars longer and find it an increasing challenge to keep their valuable asset looking good.

Cleaning your car doesn't have to be an unending chore. With the help of a few cleaning products and household tools, an hour or so each fortnight is all it takes to keep a car looking good.

This guide may help to solve some common problems faced by car owners trying to maintain their vehicles in pristine condition.

Safety first

- If you plan on giving your car a thorough clean, start on the interior. This way, the potentially fatal combination of electricity and water when vacuuming can be avoided.
- Give yourself enough room to move freely about the car, and don't have hoses, tools and power leads lying about your work space where they can trip you up.

Washing your car

Most commercial car cleaning products contain chemicals that may disturb the environment.

- Washing your car over grass helps reduce the amount of contaminated run off that ends up in our waterways.
- A pistol grip nozzle fitted to the hose is convenient and helps minimise water wastage.

Most cars need to be washed at least once a fortnight, depending on how often the car is driven and where it is garaged.

1. Begin by hosing the car down, including the wheel arches where mud and sand build up and encourage rust.
2. Remove any tar or squashed insects from the paint work with a soft rag soaked in mineral turpentine.
3. Use a soft foam sponge and a good quality car wash detergent or a wash and wax combination. Household detergents and car wash brushes can damage the fine layer of polish protecting the paint, meaning the car will have to be repolished more often.
4. Use a chamois to dry the car off when you've finished. This prevents unsightly soap and water stains and the chamois will pick up any small patches of dirt that may have been missed.
5. It's also a good time to check over the car for scratches and stone chips, which should be touched up as soon as possible to combat rust.
6. To finish off, wipe around the door jambs with a damp rag.

Crystal clear windows

Windows make up almost half of what you see when you look at a car, so your car won't look much good until they're clean. Most people have difficulty cleaning car windows, but it's actually a simple job once you know how.

1. Do the outside of each window first. This makes marks on the inside easier to see.

2. Spray a fine mist of household glass cleaner onto the window and wipe the glass over with a damp chamois.
3. Then, using a clean, DRY rag, quickly polish off the remaining moisture.

If the window dries too quickly or looks “smudgy” when you have finished, make the chamois a little wetter and do the window again. Use glass cleaner and a steel wool pad to remove any squashed insects from the windscreen.

Of course a degree of common sense is required here to avoid scratching the glass.

Polishing

Auto accessory outlets carry a huge range of car polishes. Who knows if one is better than another?

- Keep in mind that, generally, the easier a polish is to apply the more often it will need to be done and that more expensive polishes do give a superior finish.

Polishing the car about once every three months should be enough to keep the paint work well protected. If the car’s paint looks very dull or flat, get some advice from a professional car detailer before attempting to polish it yourself.

Carpets and seats

Most household vacuum cleaners are up to the job of cleaning car carpets. Cleaning around seats and consoles is easier if you use a long, thin crevice tool. The most important thing to remember is to be methodical.

1. Divide the interior into quarters, then, in each area, vacuum the seat, the carpets down each side of the seat and finally the rest of the foot space. No dirt should be missed if this pattern is followed.

2. If the carpets are full of sand, vacuum up as much as possible then gently tap the carpet with a small hammer to bounce the sand up from within the pile for easier vacuuming.
3. Scrubbing the carpets with a dry scrubbing brush will also loosen sand and dried mud. Keep vacuuming until little or no sand remains - remember nothing will wear out carpets or fabric seats quicker than grains of sand grinding away at the fibres.
4. Dashboards collect plenty of dust, but a quick wipe over with a damp chamois is usually enough to keep them clean. Air vents and switches can be dusted with a dry 25 mm paint brush.
5. If necessary scrub the dash and console with a weak detergent solution and an old toothbrush, especially around cracks and crevices. Wipe the dash dry with a clean rag.

Dog hair

Dog hair is the most tiresome of all passengers. It sticks to suits and jumpers whenever someone sits in the car yet refuses to budge for the vacuum.

The dimpled rubber gloves used by animal groomers are the best thing for cleaning up dog and cat hair. They are available from vets, and as they are not expensive, are a good investment if animals travel in the car regularly.

Simply slip the glove on and rub the offending area in a circular motion, following closely with the vacuum in the other hand.

A scrubbing brush can also be handy for loosening up animal hair in hard to get at areas.

Stained fabric seats and carpets

These are best cleaned by a professional.

- Small marks can be removed with a little soap and water and a scrubbing brush.
- Press the wet area firmly with a towel to soak up excess water.

Some extra tips Vinyl Trims

Ink, grease and other marks on vinyl trims can sometimes be removed using the same detergent mix and a piece of steel wool.

- GENTLY rub the mark and it should come off - if not, it's probably there for life.
- Apply vinyl restorers sparingly. Spray the restorer onto a rag and wipe it over the trim, then wipe over the area again with a dry rag to remove any excess.

Wheels

Alloy wheels should be cleaned with good quality mag wheel cleaner. Use an old toothbrush to clean any hard to get at areas. Tyres can be renewed with vinyl restorer. Black plastic bumpers trims and mouldings can be cleaned with soap and water and a scrubbing brush then treated with a vinyl restorer.

Soft tops and tonneau covers

- Soft tops and tonneau covers can be scrubbed with detergent and water then treated with a vinyl restorer.
- Visibility through scratched plastic rear windows in convertibles can sometimes be improved by polishing the window with good quality car polish.
- Sap can be removed using very hot water or mineral turpentine, provided it hasn't been on the car too long. Don't rub too hard as the paint can be easily scratched. If the sap won't come off, see a professional detailer.

Professional detailers

Car detailers clean cars. Most reputable businesses advertise through the Yellow Pages telephone directory and provide good service and high quality results. Prices will vary according to the type and condition of the car. If your car is in bad shape, have it professionally detailed then try to keep up with cleaning it yourself.