

Winterizing Your Car

Preparing a car for cold weather is an integral part of keeping it running at peak performance. This is especially important during the winter months, as vehicle failure during a snowstorm can turn into a dangerous situation.

Many auto repair shops offer preventative maintenance packages that include winterizing services. Consider the following tips when winterizing your vehicle, but these tips should not take the place of having your vehicle thoroughly checked by a professional.

Tires and Brakes

Install a new set of radial tires (sometimes called snow tires) or all-weather tires before the first snowfall. Radial and non-radial tires should never be combined on a single-vehicle. Many states have banned the use of metal-studded tires, which provide greater traction in the snow but cause damage to roadways. Be sure to check with your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for guidelines. Typically, states that do allow studded tires limit their use to late October through March.

Tire pressure can drop in cold weather, so be sure to check tire pressure regularly. Pressure gauges can be purchased at auto parts stores and are an easy and inexpensive way to keep tire pressure in check.

Always keep a jack, tire iron and properly inflated spare tire in the trunk at all times.

Have a mechanic check brake pads, discs and lines for signs of wear or damage. These items should be checked every six months. If necessary, have them replaced.

Lights

Most states now require drivers to turn on their vehicle's headlights whenever weather conditions require the use of windshield wipers. Daytime running lights do not qualify as headlights, so make sure both high beams and low beams are in proper working order.

Some cars are equipped with front fog lights, rear fog lights or both, to be used during heavy fog or similar hazardous weather conditions that seriously restrict a driver's visibility. Some states limit the size and color of fog lights. For example, certain areas may allow only white- or amber-colored front fog lights. Check with your state's DMV for specific information.

Coolant, Oil and Gas

Flush the cooling system and replace the coolant with the proper mix of antifreeze and water. These levels should be checked weekly.

Change your vehicle's motor oil to an oil with a lower viscosity rating. Doing so allows the oil to circulate better in freezing temperatures than oil with higher viscosity.

Keep the gas tank as full as possible to prevent moisture from freezing in the gas lines. Some types of gasoline contain fuel additives to prevent freezing but consult with your vehicle's owner's guide first, as some fuel additives can create performance problems.

Windshield Wiper Fluid and Blades

Replace old windshield wiper blades with ones made specifically for winter weather conditions. Winter blades are typically more durable and prevent the blades from clogging with ice or snow.

Keep the windshield washer fluid reservoir full at all times. A freeze-resistant cleaning solution may need to be added during the winter months.

Battery

Check the electrolyte levels of the car battery. If the battery is more than five years old, replace it.

Emergency Kit

Keep an emergency kit in your car. While it would seem logical to keep the kit in the trunk, the trunk might not be accessible following an accident such as sliding off the road into a deep ditch. Consider putting it into a box or duffel bag in the footwell of the back seat.

The kit should include:

- Blanket
- Small snow shovel
- Flashlight
- Flares
- Cat litter (to be used for traction when stuck in the snow)
- Snow and ice scrapers
- Jump-start cables

Because hypothermia can set in quickly, it is also helpful to keep these items in the car:

- Boots
- Hat
- Gloves
- Non-perishable snacks such as granola bars or dried fruit
- First aid kit

Resources

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: www.nhtsa.gov/winter-driving-safety
- Ready.gov: www.ready.gov/winter-weather

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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