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- Boundaries
- No-Mow Yard
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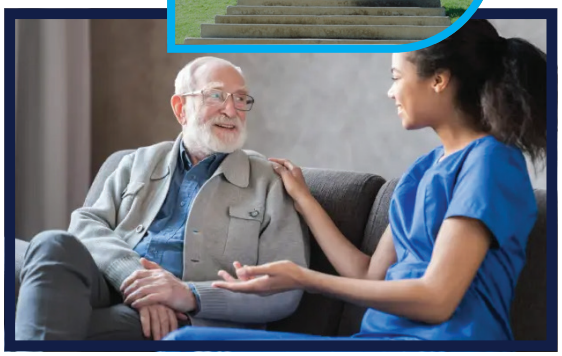
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Set Beautiful BOUNDARIES


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Border gardens are the backdrop for the rest of the yard and, properly done, add depth, dimension and color to make the garden come alive.

Ask your garden center experts about what works best in your growing zone and then look for these beauties to add to your borders.

Pansies

Pansies are the annual stars of the fall garden. They thrive in USDA zones 6-10 and come in just about any color you can imagine. Plus, they're frost hardy. Plant them together for a mass of color or put individual plants into bare spots at the front for pops of color. Deadhead the plants regularly to keep them blooming.

Black-Eyed Susans

This native wildflower belongs to the sunflower family and looks like it with bright yellow petals around a strikingly dark center. It's a drought-tolerant plant that loves full sun and attracts pollinators such as bees and butterflies. They're hardy in zones 3-9 and readily self-seed, meaning they'll be back.

Dahlias

Dahlias come in a range of colors and branch out from tuberous roots that can be overwintered in place as long as the climate isn't too cold (think zone 7 and up). They grow upright and, depending on the variation, can have contrasting foliage in addition to bright blooms. Plant them in a site with good drainage that gets full sun. They're also container friendly.

Agapanthus

Agapanthus feature bright, purple or white blooms that arch up out of lime green leaves and are good for the middle tier of the border. They love heat and are hardy in zones 8-11 and prefer partial sunlight, especially in warmer, southern climates. They can stay evergreen through winter, adding interest even in colder months.

Lupines

If you're looking for tall, structural color, look no further than the lupine. It's a diverse family of more than 500 flowering perennials that bloom from spring to summer with fragrant blossoms. They're hardy from zones 4-9, but may turn annual in warmer climates.

Coneflower

Otherwise known as echinacea, they have large, showy blooms with petals that push away from a large, vibrant center. They're members of the daisy family and are native to North America. The flowers grow at the end of 2-4 foot stems, so put them toward the center or back of a border garden. They're hardy in zones 3-9 and are adaptable to growing conditions across most of the U.S.



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IDEAS FOR A NO-MOW YARD

American grass yards cover about 1.9% of the land area of the U.S. and keeping them green can guzzle millions of gallons of water per day.

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Furthermore, gas-powered lawn and garden equipment consumes gas and spits out pollution and noise. The good news is there are options for no-mow yards for anywhere in the country. Depending on your hardiness zone, here are some plants to consider.

Clover

White Dutch Clover or microclover handles pets and walking well and can green up any remaining turf by drawing in more nitrogen. Microclover is a newer, low-growing variety and can take occasional mowing if needed. It's hardy zones 3-10 and doesn't bloom.

Blue Star Creeper

This small, fast-growing groundcover is a great no-mow substitute. It can take foot traffic and holds up well to sunlight or shade (but the flower color may be more muted the more shade there is). Speaking of flowers, they do bloom tiny, pale blue flowers from spring through late summer and offers tiny green leaves all year round. It's hardy in zones 5-9.

Veronica 'Waterperry Blue'

Another blue or purple flowering star of the no-mow lawn is Veronica or speedwell. It grows to five inches tall and spreads to 15 inches wide, spreading deep green leaves that turn coppery in fall and tiny blue booms in the spring and summer. It's hardy in zones 5-8.

Moss

Shade has its own solution — moss. It stays green all year and requires very little maintenance. It also, depending on the variety, has a soft, carpet-like texture and is good for the soil. It likes compacted, acidic, nutrient-poor soils, but you can test your soil and amend it to make sure. Get your moss from a reputable local nursery; crafting moss won't grow.

Creeping Jenny or Moneywort

This is a fast-spreading green or even gold groundcover that can trail over slopes and walls.

It has yellow flowers and spreads quickly but not vertically, getting a mere two inches tall.

It likes most terrain and soil, including shade, and is hardy in zones 3-9.

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EFFICIENT WINDOW TREATMENTS



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Thermal window treatments work by blocking sun and radiant heat in summer, but they can also help in colder months with retaining heat.

About 30% of a home's heating energy is lost through windows, the U.S. Department of Energy says, and thermal window coverings can help mitigate that loss.

Certifications

The Department of Energy says to look for window products certified by the Attachments Energy Rating Council (AERC). The council's rating indicates the product has been certified according to strict standards maintained by the independent organization. The group has a certified product search that allows you to find the right product for you.

Open and Close Strategically

Most window coverings are movable, the department says, but about 75% of residential window coverings stay in the same position all the time. The agency warns people not to fall into that habit and open and close your coverings depending on conditions outside. If it's cool and sunny, leave your window treatments open to take advantage of the sun's heat. If it's cold and cloudy, leave them closed to keep the heater or furnace's warmth in.

Hang the draperies as close to the windows as possible and make sure the drapes fall onto a windowsill or to the floor. Installing a cornice at the top of the drapery or placing the drapes against the ceiling can further reduce heat loss.

The Department of Energy says that keeping conventional drapes closed during cold weather can reduce heat loss from a warm room up to 10%. In cold weather, close the draperies at night and keep any that don't receive sunlight closed during the day. For extra protection, hang two sets of draperies together. The room-side drapery will maintain around the same temperature as the interior space, the Department of Energy says.

Window Films

For extra protection, the Department of Energy says window films applied to the glazing surface of the window can protect against glare, solar heat gain and UV exposure. However, they can block heat even in cooler weather. Be aware if you have these films on your windows, trying to use the sun's heat to your advantage in winter months may not work.

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STYLING
Your Fireplace



© ADOBE STOCK

For homes with a fireplace, there's no quicker way to get warm and cozy than by lighting a fire. However, it's important to style these focal points of the home carefully.

The U.S. Fire Administration says fireplaces cause about 27,900 residential building heating fires every year, resulting in 115 deaths, 525 injuries and millions in property damage.

Using the Wall Space

Optimize the wall space above your fireplace by hanging a large gallery wall or your favorite large-format wall art. You can opt for mirrors or even a gathering of mirrors to anchor the space and enlarge the appearance of your room. You can create groupings of family photos to really personalize the space.

Hanging by the TV

You can install your television above the fireplace. This is probably a job for a professional installer to make sure it's far enough away to not be affected by the fireplace's heat. Also, fishing the wires in the wall and mounting a heavy appliance like the TV can be difficult for even the best DIY'er. Talk to your local electronics store to find reputable installers in your area and find out what accessories you may need or want.

Options for the Inside

If you live in a warmer climate or maybe aren't comfortable running the fireplace as usual, you can turn off the fuel source, such as the gas, remove the logs, close the flue and arrange candles in an attractive group — use varying heights and colors to add interest — and light those to give you hygge without the hassle. Do make sure not to leave any lit candles unattended; if you're still concerned, look into LED candles that look realistic.

Options if You Don't Have a Fireplace

If you don't have a fireplace installed in your home, you can still enjoy the ambiance.

Hang a wall-mounted electric fireplace or choose furniture, such as a television console, with an electric fireplace built in. Add firepit glass with appropriate units that come in a wide array of colors and reflect the light of the fire.

Model of a Mantle

Stock your mantle with collections of various sizes, including super cozy lanterns, candles or family pictures. Garlands are a good choice provided they don't dangle too close to any heat source.

Mantles are a good place for soft, ambient lighting or adding height with tall vases with slender, elegant stems.

REDUCING NOISE POLLUTION


© ADOBE STOCK

We know about pollution from things like car exhaust or wastewater, but noise pollution is real, too.

You can't see it, but it's there, in everything from lawn equipment, ringing telephones, to even things like planes taking off and traffic.

What are the Effects of Noise Pollution?

One of the most obvious consequences of noise pollution is noise-induced hearing loss. This comes from regular exposure to noise that measures over 85 decibels. When noise gets too loud, it can damage parts of the ear that can't repair themselves. This hearing loss is usually gradual and may not be noticed until it's significant.

Noise Pollution Around the Home

There are ways you can reduce noise pollution in and around your home. Inside, seal gaps and windows to prevent outside sound (and air) from leaking in. Consider upgrading to double-paned or laminated soundproof windows if you live in a particularly loud environment. You can surround yourself with soft furnishings. Hard surfaces can reflect and amplify sound.

Outside, one of the principal culprits in noise pollution is lawn equipment. Instead of loud internal combustion power equipment, consider switching to electric tools when you can. Not only do they not depend on fossil fuels and emit exhaust, but they can be quieter than traditional, gas-powered lawn equipment.

Another common source of noise pollution is car traffic. Make sure your cars and other vehicles are regularly maintained to manage loud engine or exhaust noise. Keep the volume down on car stereos as well as on TVs and radios.

Other Things You Can Do

There are other ways you can help buffer noise around your home. They include:

- Planting rows of evergreen trees, shrubs or hedges to absorb and deflect sound waves.
- Advocate for urban noise reduction policies, including concrete sound barriers, speed limit reductions and quiet zones.
- Help institute initiatives such as construction hours, quiet hours and commercial venue hours.
- Enlist help from advocacy groups such as Quiet Communities, Noise Free America or the Center for Hearing and Communication. Get your neighbors involved and share information about the cardiovascular and mental health effects of rises in noise exposure.

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MANAGING COMPOST

Composting is a useful way to manage organic scraps from the kitchen and yard and turn it into a stable soil amendment that can be used to build soil health and provide nutrients to plants.

But just dumping scraps in a pile and hoping for the best won't yield you results you need. Here's how to manage your organic waste and your compost pile.

What You Need for Composting

You need the right mix of scraps for composting. It's helpful, the EPA says, to think of the ingredients in terms of browns, greens, moisture and oxygen. Browns are carbon-rich materials. These are things such as dry leaves, plant stalks, shredded uncolored paper and brown bags, shredded cardboard without tape or wax coatings and untreated wood chips. Greens are fruit and veggie scraps, grass clippings, coffee grounds and crushed eggshells.

The EPA says not to put meat, fish and bones; cheese and dairy products; fats, oils and grease; cooked foods; plants and grass treated with herbicides; aggressive weeds or weeds with seeds; treated or painted wood; dryer lint; pet waste; glossy paper and produce stickers into your compost pile.

Start Your Pile

Begin collecting scraps for the compost pile in your kitchen and in a space outside. Set up a space for the pile in a spot that's easily accessible and has good drainage. Choose a bin or other kind of containment and get it set up. You want to make sure there's a way to water it nearby.

Add browns and greens to the pile, making sure they're broken up in smaller pieces to help the materials break down faster. Start with a four to six-inch layer of bulky brown items, then layer in greens and smaller browns. Add water to dampen the pile. Then, keep it going. Try to add at least two or three times the browns as greens and make sure food scraps are covered by browns. Turn your compost occasionally and maintain a moisture level to ensure the materials have the consistency of a wrung-out sponge.

Decomposing

As your compost decomposes, the pile will get hot. In the center, it can reach 130-160 degrees. These hot temperatures help reduce the presence of pathogens and weed seeds. If the pile gets too dry, the EPA says to moisten it and turn it. If it has a bad odor, add more browns and turn the pile. If it's not heating up, mix in greens and turn the pile.

When the pile is no longer heating up after mixing or when there's no more visible food scraps, allow the pile to cure for about four weeks. The pile should shrink to about a third of its original size. Your compost will be ready to use in about three to five months. It should look like dark, loose soil and smell like fresh soil, too.

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Prepare for the UNEXPECTED

A roadside breakdown is never convenient, but colder weather can make an unexpected delay more challenging.

Whether you're waiting for roadside assistance or sitting through a weather-related traffic backup, a few simple preparations can make the experience safer and more comfortable.

Build an Emergency Kit

Keep a small emergency kit in your vehicle throughout the fall and winter. Include a warm blanket, flashlight, extra gloves or a hat, and a phone charging cable or portable battery pack. Shelf-stable snacks, such as granola bars or nuts, can also come in handy during a long delay.

If you frequently travel through areas that experience severe winter weather, consider packing additional cold-weather gear, such as boots, an extra layer of clothing, or traction aids. A snow brush and ice scraper are winter essentials in many parts of the country.

Carry bottled water, but remember that water left in a vehicle during freezing temperatures may freeze.

Leave room in the bottle for expansion or replace it as needed.

Stock a First-Aid Kit

A basic first-aid kit is useful year-round. Include adhesive bandages, gauze, antiseptic wipes, gloves, and any personal medications you may need.

Check the kit periodically and replace expired or used items.

Before You Hit the Road

Winter is a good time to review your emergency contacts and roadside assistance information. Save important phone numbers in your contacts, and keep your cellphone charged. Most vehicles include USB ports or other charging options, so keeping a charging cable in your vehicle can ensure you can call for help if needed.

Finally, avoid letting your fuel tank get too low during colder months. If you're delayed by severe weather or waiting for assistance, having extra fuel allows you to run the heater periodically while conserving fuel until help arrives.

If you become stranded during severe winter weather, remain with your vehicle whenever it is safe to do so. A vehicle is easier for emergency responders to locate than a person on foot and provides shelter from the elements.

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Fall DRIVING CHECKLIST



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Make sure your car is ready for the seasonal changes ahead. It's a matter of safeguarding your vehicle, but also yourself, your passengers and others who might be out on the road in wintry conditions.

Staying on the road

Cold weather is particularly hard on car batteries because low temperatures slow the chemical reactions that produce electricity. If your battery is aging, or if your vehicle was slow to start during the summer, consider replacing it before winter arrives. If you're unsure about your battery's condition, many auto parts stores offer free battery testing.

Tires also deserve extra attention before colder weather arrives. Adequate tire tread helps maintain traction on wet, snowy, and icy roads, while proper tire pressure supports safe handling and can improve fuel economy. Because tire pressure drops as temperatures fall, check it regularly throughout the season.

Winter weather can also take a toll on windshield wipers. Inspect the blades for signs of wear and replace them if they leave streaks or miss sections of the windshield. Before cold weather sets in, top off your windshield washer fluid and check your vehicle's other essential fluids. Most drivers can handle these simple maintenance tasks without a trip to a mechanic.

Making fixes

Use a tread-depth gauge, or perform the familiar penny test as a quick screening tool. If the tread is approaching the top of Lincoln's head, consider replacing the tires before winter, when additional tread can improve traction on wet and snowy roads. The penny test approximates a 2/32 inch of tread. However, many safety organizations recommend replacing ties used in wet or snowy conditions well before they reach 2/32 inch because traction deteriorates significantly before then. A quarter test or measuring tread depth with a gauge provides more useful information.

Many newer vehicles monitor tire pressure and will alert you through the dashboard or a smartphone app if pressure drops. Even so, it's a good idea to check tire pressure periodically with a tire gauge, especially as temperatures begin to fall. If you don't own one, many air pumps at gas stations have a gauge on the nozzle. Check the sticker inside the driver's door or consult your owner's manual for the manufacturer's recommended tire pressure. For best testing results, check after your car or truck has been stationary for at least half an hour.

DON'T FORGET YOUR BATTERY



One of the most important things that keeps your vehicle going is tucked away under the hood.

A healthy battery is essential for starting your vehicle, and cold weather can place additional strain on it.

How it works

Batteries naturally lose their charge over time. Add in fall and winter's cooler temperatures, and they can fail at the worst possible moment. Your battery provides the power to start the vehicle and run some accessories. (The alternator then provides continual power as your journey continues.)

Cold temperatures slow the chemical reactions inside the battery, reducing the amount of power it can deliver. At the same time, cold engines require more energy to start, making winter one of the most demanding seasons for a battery.

Why they fail

Batteries lose their charge for a variety of reasons. The car may have been parked for too long or an interior light could have been inadvertently left on. They have a limited shelf life.

Sometimes, however, the problem isn't the battery's age or some mishap. Batteries with loose cables may degrade more quickly. Faulty wiring, malfunctioning interior electronics or lights and bad fuses can drain your battery even when the vehicle isn't running.

What you can do

Frequent short trips may not fully recharge the battery. Occasional longer drives can help maintain its charge, especially during colder weather. This will naturally replenish the battery's energy. Before leaving your vehicle, make sure lights and other accessories are turned off. If your vehicle has accessories that continue drawing power while parked, follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Make sure the trunk, glove box and doors are completely closed.

If you're going to store your vehicle for the winter, consider purchasing the modern-era wonder called a battery maintainer (sometimes called a trickle charger). Sold at most local auto-care stores, they provide low-level current that replaces the need to regularly run the vehicle. The low-tech approach to extending battery life when the vehicle is not in use has always been to simply disconnect it. But that can wreak havoc with computer systems. You'll lose other settings, including radio presets, trip mileage and clocks.

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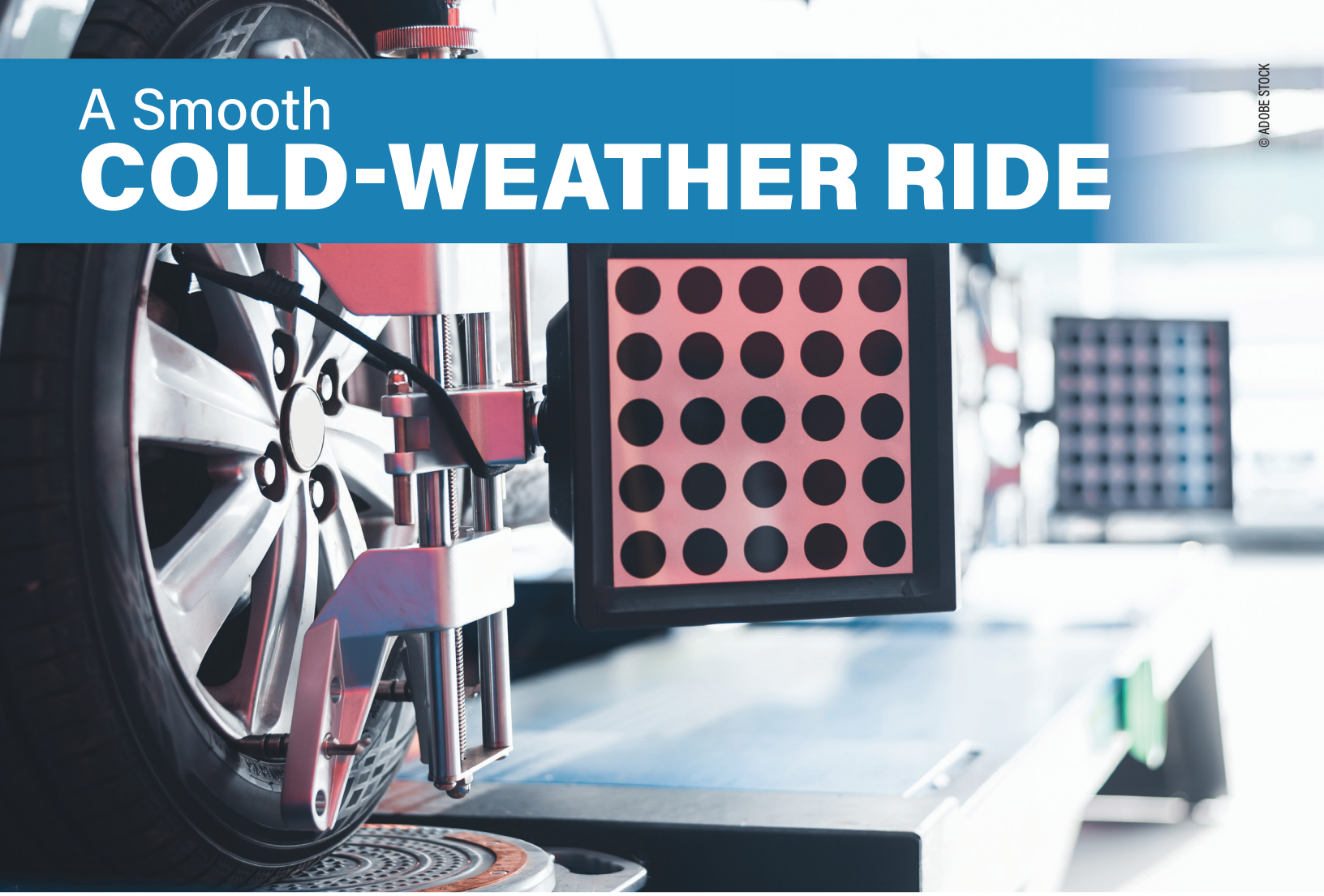
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A Smooth COLD-WEATHER RIDE



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Cold weather, rain, snow and potholes can all take a toll on your tires.

Before winter driving begins, take a few minutes to inspect them and make sure they're ready for the season.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Now is the time to prepare for the (bumpy) road again. Inspect your tires with an eye on replacing them, as needed. You'll be going a long way toward ensuring the safety of your passengers and those around you. As temperatures drop, tire pressure naturally decreases. Check tire pressure monthly during colder weather and adjust it according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Improperly inflated tires make it more difficult to brake and steer, creating the perfect situation for an accident. Worse, a blown tire in icy conditions can make a bad situation much, much worse. Properly maintained, unworn tires provide more traction, better breaking, better steering and longer tire life, while improving your fuel efficiency along the way.

Your vehicle's recommended tire pressure is listed on the driver's door-jamb placard or in the owner's manual.

ALIGNING AND ROTATION

We tend to overlook the importance of rotating and aligning tires, no matter the season. Rotate your tires according to your vehicle manufacturer's maintenance schedule, typically every 5,000 to 8,000 miles. Have the alignment checked if the vehicle pulls to one side, the steering wheel is off-center, you notice uneven tire wear, or after a significant impact with a pothole or curb. Check your owner's manual for more information. The manufacturer may have different guidelines for your specific vehicle.

Rotating tires leads to a more even wear pattern. Proper alignment extends their life while also ensuring a better grip on the road. That's particularly important during the fall and winter seasons. If you strike a large pothole or curb, inspect the tire for damage and have the vehicle's alignment checked if you notice vibration, pulling, or unusual tire wear. Tire balancing is often checked during rotation or whenever new tires are installed.

CLOSE INSPECTION

Regularly check your tires for cracks, bulges or embedded objects. Nails that aren't obviously protruding can still cause a dangerous blowout in the future. If you see a defect or puncture, have the tire repaired as soon as possible. When replacing tires, follow your vehicle manufacturer's recommendations. Some all-wheel-drive vehicles require closely matched tire tread depths to help prevent drivetrain damage.

BATTLING THE ELEMENTS

Your vehicle's exterior faces year-round wear from sun, rain, road debris, bird droppings and other environmental hazards. Fall and winter introduce another challenge: road salt, slush and moisture that can accelerate corrosion.

Staying on schedule

Washing a car or truck can feel like more of a summertime ritual, but it's just as important to keep the exterior clean when you're not taking sunny afternoon drives. Accumulated road salt is a particular danger to the integrity of your lower fenders, bumpers and wheel wells. Wash your vehicle regularly during the winter, especially after driving on salted roads. Paying extra attention to the wheel wells and underbody can help remove salt before it contributes to corrosion. Consider occasional underbody washes if road salt is common in your area.

Rinse away loose dirt and road salt before washing to reduce the risk of scratching the paint. Use a car-wash soap formulated for automotive finishes rather than household detergents. Dry the vehicle with a microfiber towel or soft cloth to help prevent water spots.

Long-term care

Waxing or sealing can create a protective layer against the harsh elements. Wax or apply a paint sealant according to the manufacturer's recommendations to help protect the finish from the elements. First, do a thorough cleanings. Otherwise, small pieces of debris can become trapped in the wax and cause damage to the vehicle's clear coating. Both waxes and paint sealants help protect a vehicle's finish. Follow the product's instructions for application and maintenance.

Other tips

If possible, park in a covered area or garage. This shields the vehicle from harsh elements and fading. If you use a car cover, choose one designed for your vehicle and use it on a clean vehicle to help avoid scratching the finish.

Pick a place to park where you can easily come and go in slippery conditions. Shade can help reduce sun exposure during warmer months, but avoid parking beneath trees during winter storms, when snow- or ice-laden branches may break.





Don't Forget YOUR LIGHTS

Your vehicle's lighting system has a lot of working parts.

Brake lights let those behind you know that you're slowing down, either because of traffic or a road hazard. Turn signals translate your intentions to other drivers. Daytime running lights help make your vehicle more visible to other drivers, while headlights become increasingly important as daylight hours shorten in the fall.

Keep an eye out

Sometimes bulbs begin to fade before they go out completely. You might not immediately notice, particularly if you don't often drive at night. If they fail, however, you will find yourself suddenly having difficulty seeing the road ahead. A burned-out light can reduce visibility and make it harder for other drivers to see your vehicle. In many places, it can also result in a traffic stop or citation.

Many newer vehicles will notify you if an exterior bulb fails. Even so, it's still a good idea to perform a visual inspection before winter because some lighting issues may not trigger a warning.

Wait until dusk, when it's easier to see which lights are working. You'll need someone else to help by sitting in the vehicle and turning the lights on and off. Turn on the headlights and check the low beams, high beams, daytime running lights (if equipped), parking lights, brake lights, hazard flashers, turn signals, side marker lights, and the license plate light.

What to do next

With older models, owners could easily switch out a failing bulb and then get right back on the road. That's not always the case today. Many newer vehicles use LED or HID lighting instead of traditional halogen bulbs. These systems generally last longer and provide brighter illumination, but repairs can be more complex and expensive.

Some vehicles require replacement of an entire light assembly, while others make bulb replacement difficult because of limited access. Depending on the design, the repair may be best left to a qualified technician. Check your owner's manual or call the dealership to learn more about manufacturer recommendations. If you notice dim, flickering, or inoperative lights during your inspection, schedule repairs before winter weather and shorter days make good visibility even more important.



ORGANIZING THE GLOVE BOX

It can be hard to make time to keep everything organized — and that's often particularly true of your vehicle's glove box.

There are plenty of essential items usually found in them, from proof of insurance to the owner's manual. But there's a lot of junk sometimes, too, including things like extra napkins, crumpled receipts, ketchup packets, too many pens and maybe a few old compact discs. All signs of a summer well-lived but now gone. Now's the time to get back on track for the coming winter.

Why it's important

Aside from giving you a sense of organizational accomplishment, organizing your glove box could help lower your stress. After all, you don't want to end up digging around for key documentation after being in an accident or pulled over by law enforcement. An organized glove box gives you easier access to needed items like a tire gauge and the owner's manual when it's time to take care of regular maintenance.

Many people still keep proof of insurance inside the glove box, though many states accept electronic insurance cards and digital proof on your phone. If you keep the paper copies, make sure they are up to date. You'll need proof of registration, as well. Keep your title at home, however, in case the vehicle is stolen.

Key items

The glove box is a useful place to keep key medical information. You may not be able to communicate with emergency personnel after being in an accident and information about critical medications and allergies can help them make treatment decisions. Consider keeping emergency contact information in your phone using its emergency features. If you have significant medical conditions or allergies, wearing a medical alert bracelet or carrying a medical information card can help first responders provide appropriate care.

Tuck maintenance and repair records inside the owner's manual so that you have a record of everything that's been done. Plastic bags can come in handy for collecting any trash from inside the car. Keep a small flashlight in the glove box or emergency kit, even if your smartphone has a built-in flashlight. A dedicated light can be useful if you're trying to conserve your phone's battery.

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