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Tips to winterize your vehicle

The elements pose a unique challenge to motor vehicles, and that’s particularly notable when seasons change. Though the shift from spring to summer or even summer to fall may not be too significant, drivers who want to safeguard their vehicles would be wise to take certain measures to prepare their cars or trucks for winter weather.

Winterizing a car can be an important part of vehicle maintenance. That’s particularly true for vehicle owners who live in regions where winter is marked by especially cold temperatures and/or significant snowfall. As fall gives way to winter, drivers can take these steps to winterize their vehicles.

- Address tires and tire pressure. The experts at Kelley Blue Book note the danger of aging and/or poorly inflated tires, particularly in winter. Icy, wet and/or snow-covered roads can be dangerous to traverse, so it benefits drivers to examine their tires prior to winter. Worn down treads reduce traction and make it more difficult for vehicles to stop, which is already challenging on roads where ice is present. It’s equal-

ly important to keep tires properly inflated, as KBB reports each 10-degree dip in temperature can lead to a one-pound loss in air pressure. Poorly inflated tires can decrease performance and safety on the road.

- Check the battery and replace it, if necessary. Another step to winterize a car involves the battery that helps to keep the vehicle running. The automotive experts at Firestone note that sinking temperatures force the chemical reaction within vehicle batteries to slow, which reduces the amount of power the battery can generate. In fact, Firestone estimates a battery can lose as much as 60 percent of its strength in freezing temperatures. Firestone urges drivers to get a battery assessment test prior to winter to ensure the battery is healthy enough to endure the coming months. If the assessment indicates the battery is weak, replace it prior to winter.

- Check fluid levels. Routine vehicle maintenance at an auto body shop or car dealership typically involves checking and topping off fluid levels. Book such an appointment in advance of

winter to ensure the vehicle has coolant, which KBB notes is formulated to resist freezing. Without sufficient coolant, a vehicle engine can suffer significant damage. Windshield washer fluid also should be filled to ensure the windshield can be sufficiently cleaned of salt during and after snowstorms. A pre-winter oil change also can help the vehicle run smoothly throughout the colder months.

- Inspect belts and hoses. KBB notes cold weather weakens belts and hoses,

which can become brittle and fail in low temperatures. Belts and hoses should be checked prior to winter. Engines can overheat, electrical system problems can emerge and power steering may be compromised if belts and hoses are allowed to fall into disrepair.

Winter can be a challenging time of year for cars and trucks. Various strategies to winterize a car before the mercury drops can make it safer to be on the road when the weather turns cold. TF25A227

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Snow blower safety tips

Meteorologists are predicting an El Niño weather pattern this winter. What that spells out for particular regions of the country remains to be seen, but when snow hits certain areas hard, cleanup will be necessary.

It is essential for homeowners and business owners to get outdoors promptly to remove snow from walkways for the safety of pedestrians. Shoveling snow can be back-breaking work, particularly when the snow is very wet or compacted. That’s why many people have invested (or plan to invest) in snow blowers to make faster work of snow removal. While these tools are quite effective, they require caution and proper technique to help avoid injuries. The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates there are 5,740 hospital emer-

gency room-related injuries associated with snow blowers each year. The organization Safety Now says most injuries associated with snow blowers involve injuries to the hands or fingers, including amputation.

Individuals can prevent common injuries and even death by following these snow blower safety guidelines.

- Read the owner’s manual to understand all of the controls and features before use.
- Dress accordingly for the weather, including using sturdy footwear with good traction. Boot or shoe grippers can reduce the risk of slips and falls. Also, avoid loose clothing, as scarves or jackets can become tangled in moving parts of the machine.
- Start the snow blower outside and

not in a garage or shed. Gas-powered devices give off carbon monoxide.

- Stay focused on the task at hand, which means using the snow blower only when sober and not under the influence of medications that can cause drowsiness.
- Working at a brisk pace can help prevent the snow blower blades from getting clogged from the snow sticking. Wet, heavy snow is more likely to clog the machine, so it may require more passes to get the job done.
- Clogs can occur, and require extreme caution to dislodge. Always turn off the snow blower and disengage the clutch, says the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. Wait for the impeller blades to stop spinning. Always use a broom handle or a stick to clear

compacted snow. Never stick your hand down the chute or around the blades, even if the power switch is off.

- Keep all safety shields and mechanisms in place on the machine.
 - Do not leave a snow blower unattended.
 - If the snow blower is an electrical version, use an extension cord designed for outdoor use and plug it into an outlet equipped with a ground fault circuit interrupter. Keep the extension cord away from the auger.
- Even though snow blowing can be less physically taxing than manually shoveling snow, it still exerts the body. Take frequent breaks to rest. Exercise caution where you toss the snow, and make sure other people, particularly children, are not in the path of snow removal.



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Get ready for a furnace checkup

Turning on the heat may be the furthest thing from homeowners' minds come the end of summer or early fall. After all, there are plenty more days of comfortable temperatures to expect over the weeks to come. However, failing to inspect a furnace prior to when it is needed could lay a foundation for cold evenings.

Many HVAC experts recommend that homeowners get their furnaces tuned up before the first cold spell arrives.

When the heat is needed for the first time, it will be guaranteed to work if it's been examined and any underlying issues have been addressed.

HVAC technicians are busy at the start of summer and winter. If a furnace is not working correctly, it could take some time before a professional can make a service call. Having the furnace and related equipment checked prior to when it's time to turn on the furnace means homeowners will not be left in

the lurch or potentially spending premium prices for repairs.

It is important to get a furnace checkup for a variety of reasons. Doing so can make the HVAC system run more efficiently, which could result in savings over the winter. Regular maintenance also can help the furnace last longer, delaying the need for a costly replacement. No one wants the furnace to break down in the middle of a frigid night. Annual checkups can help reduce

the risk of that happening. In addition, many furnace manufacturers offer warranties on their systems that require annual maintenance from a professional. Failure to have the system inspected could void the warranty.

Even if homeowners are floating in the pool and cranking up the air conditioning, they should give consideration to having their furnaces inspected and serviced soon to prepare for the colder months ahead. TF258125

How to prepare for winter storms

Winter arrives with fanfare as Christmas, Chanukah and New Year's Eve all take place within days of the first day of the season. Parties and shopping may distract people from the weather around them, but after resolutions are made and the decorations are packed away, it's not long before it's time to confront winter's wrath.

Storms are commonplace in January and February in many parts of the world, and even March storms are not unheard of. Knowing how to prepare for storms can keep people safer and prevent home damage. If a storm is forecasted, follow these guidelines.

- Charge a mobile phone and other electronic devices to full battery in advance of the storm in case power goes out.
- Stock the home with extra batteries for flashlights and battery-powered de-

vices, such as a portable radio.

- Invest in a car charger to charge devices if the power is out for some time.
- Keep a supply of canned or boxed nonperishable items, as well as convenience foods that do not need to be cooked, like granola bars.
- Periodically check to ensure that the first aid kit is stocked with items that have not expired.
- Refill medications so that they are on hand in the event weather makes it challenging to get to the store.
- Keep emergency supplies of bottled water. If you forget this, fill the bathtub up with fresh water. Extra water will be needed for toilet flushing if yours is a septic system.
- Have warm blankets on hand and sleeping bags for each person in the home.
- Unplug all electronic devices if the

power goes out to protect against a surge and damage when the power is restored.

- Exercise caution when burning candles, opting for flashlights and lanterns instead.
- If it's very cold outside, move refrigerated and frozen items outdoors so they do not spoil in an unpowered refrigerator.
- Do not use gas stoves, charcoal grills or other open-flame heat sources for warmth indoors. Carbon monoxide gas can build up inside and prove deadly.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when using a backup generator for power.
- Stock up on gasoline for vehicles and to power gas-driven generators.
- Use power company websites and apps to report outages and stay ap-



prised of restoration status.

- Be cautious of downed power lines in the area when driving or walking.

Winter storms can be beautiful but dangerous without ample preparation.

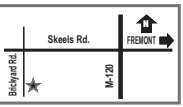


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Explaining the siding replacement process

The longer a person resides in a particular home, the greater the likelihood that various components of that residence will need to be replaced. Driveways, roofs, HVAC systems, and even appliances all have expiration dates.

Although siding on a home can be quite durable, there may be specific reasons why homeowners choose to or need to replace it at some point. Understanding what's to come of the job can help homeowners prepare. No two siding jobs are exactly the same, and each project will be dictated by a host of variables, including which type of siding homeowners choose. However, these general steps are commonplace during siding replacement projects.

• Choose siding: Homeowners are urged to consult with various siding installation companies about which products are available and ask each for an estimate. Budget, climate and other factors will narrow down siding materials. The Home Depot says popular siding types include vinyl, wood, fiber cement, metal, and stone. Siding can have almost any color or texture as well.

• Remove and relocate: Outdoor items close to the perimeter of the home will have to be moved out of the way so workers can access the siding. The job will require a dumpster to be dropped in front of the home or in the driveway to collect debris, so homeowners should be prepared to leave space for it.

• Siding delivery: The new siding should be delivered prior to the installation start day. These materials will take up a lot of room and space should be made available so the installation team can access them without difficulty.

• Interior decor: Siding installation will include hammering, which can disrupt items on interior walls. It is best to have all wall hangings taken down to prevent damage.

• Old siding removal: On the first day of installation, removal of the old siding will happen first, according to Smart Exteriors. Siding, insulation and trim will be removed. In the event that older, asbestos-based siding is on a home, contractors may safely remove and discard it, or go over that type of siding. Homeowners should inquire about this step

during the company vetting process.

• Home inspection: Once all old material is gone, the exterior sheathing will be inspected to ensure it is in good shape. Signs of rot or loose boards will be considered and repaired, if necessary.

• New siding install: First workers will put on house wrap or some sort of insulation/water barrier product. Afterwards, siding boards are layered on in the design chosen. Nails or screws are used to attach the siding and seams will be caulked to prevent moisture pene-

tration. If the homeowner has chosen to have gutters and downspouts installed during the siding job, those will be fitted and installed as well.

• Clean up: The installation team will begin the process of thoroughly cleaning up the property. All tools will be removed and the property will be swept or blown to clean away debris. Crews typically use powerful magnets to grab stray nails and screws that have fallen into the lawn and elsewhere. The dumpster will be taken away shortly after the work is completed.



Siding replacement is a big job but one that can offer immediate curb appeal once completed. It typically is not a do-it-yourself project since it requires specific skills to ensure durability.

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Tips for winterizing exterior living areas

When the summer entertaining season draws to a close, homeowners need to ensure their outdoor living areas can handle weather that's right around the corner. Although outdoor furniture and other items tend to be durable, the impact snow, wind and ice can have on them may lead to damage over time. That is why many homeowners take steps to winterize their outdoor spaces and protect their belongings. Here's a look at how to prepare for the winter to come.

- **Furniture:** Cover or store furniture to protect it from the elements. Covering it with weather-proof covers can be

adequate if storing items indoors is not possible.

- **Deep clean:** Items that will be covered or stored should be thoroughly cleaned prior to being removed from spaces for the season. Lingering dirt and moisture can cause damage.

- **Insulate and drain:** Don't risk damage to pipes, which can freeze and crack in the cold. Shut off the water supply to exterior faucets and drain water lines to prevent pipes from freezing and bursting. Use foam pipe insulation to prevent freezing and cover any exposed pipes.

- **Apply mulch:** After cleaning up garden debris, think about applying mulch

to garden beds and cover tender plants to protect them from the weather.

- **Check gutters:** Be sure that gutters and downspouts are clear of leaves and any additional debris. If gutters and downspouts are not cleaned, ice dams may form on the roof and cause water damage.

- **Inspect and repair:** Inspect walkways and driveways for any damage and make repairs now so water will not seep in and cause further issues with freeze-thaw cycles. Consider applying a sealant to protect surfaces from snow and ice.

- **Pools and spas:** It's essential to follow the industry or manufacturer

recommendations for closing down swimming pools and spas for the season. While covers may not be essential in all climates, covering can help prevent leaves and other debris from getting in the water. Water should be expelled from pipes and tubing to prevent freezing and bursting. If space allows, consider moving the pool pump indoors to prolong its longevity. Turn off the electricity to the outlet where the filter is plugged in.

There may be additional, region-specific steps to winterize a property, but these pointers are a good starting point to protect outdoor spaces.