

Spring Car Care



Washing Winter Away

The birds are radiantly chirping as the winter retreats. If your car could chirp, it may have something to say about the condition it's in.

Winter has finally slowed for many parts of the country, leaving in its wake a hoard of dirty vehicles. And although happy at the sight of melting snow and sunny skies, drivers may be less than pleased to deal with the salt and dirt buildup on their cars from a long battle with winter.

THE AFTER-EFFECTS

Road salt is used to create a lower freezing temperature on road surfaces, which leads to less ice on roadways. It is an effective tool in keeping motorists safe in otherwise austere conditions. And while this salt can save countless lives during snowstorms, it also could shorten the life of your car.

Salt is corrosive and can eat away at the paint of your vehicle. This can lead to rusting problems on the frame and damage the undercarriage. The appearance of white, chalky salt lining the bottom of your car is also visually unappealing

and is best removed sooner rather than later.

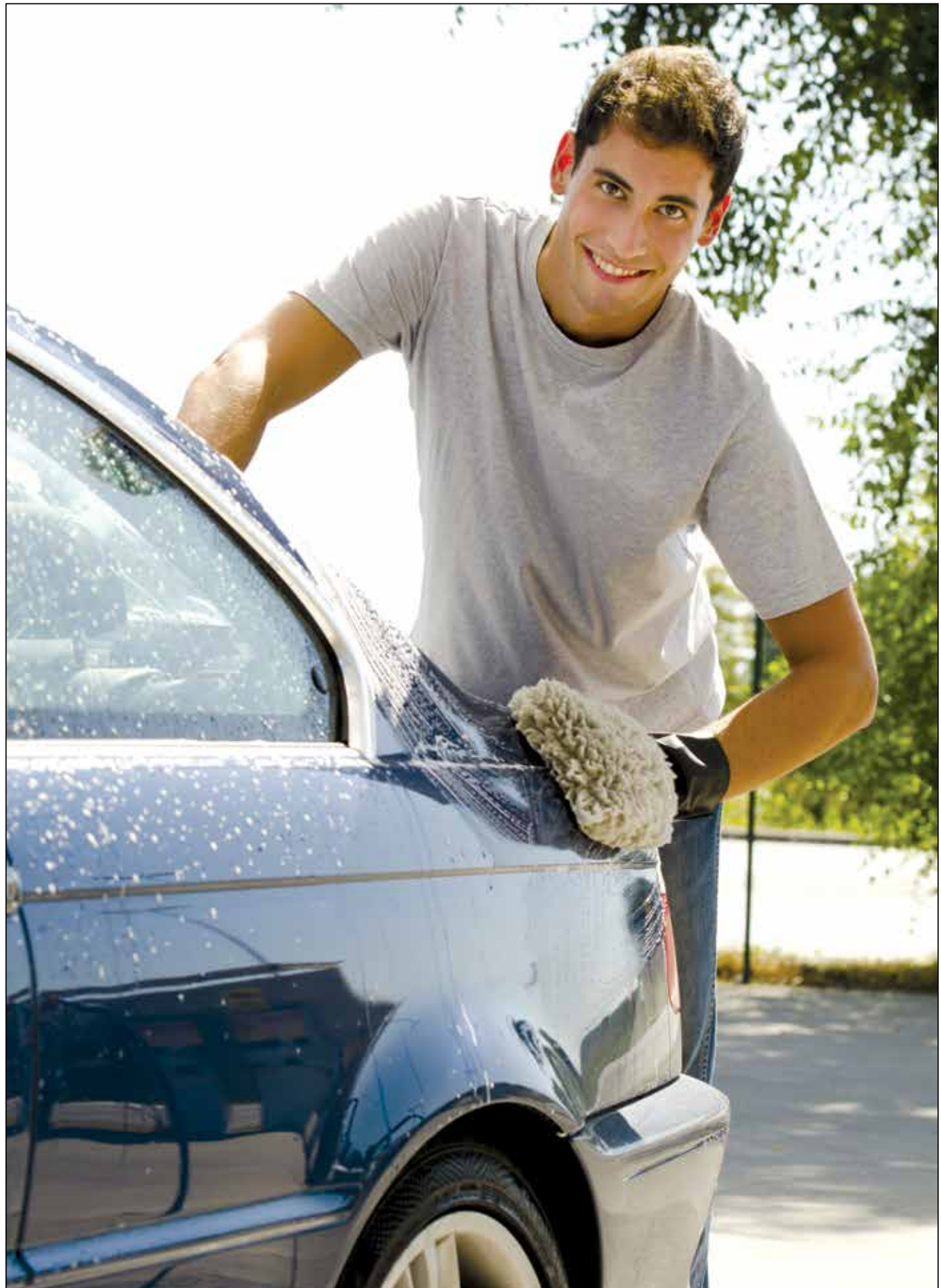
CAR WASH

It is imperative to thoroughly wash the undercarriage of your car. This is because salt sucks up the moisture in the humid air of the summer, which could lead to even more problems when the heat comes calling.

Even in chilly springtime conditions, it is good practice to head to your local car wash for regular spray downs. This will help cut down on some of the buildup while keeping your car looking great.

Just be careful not to wash your car in freezing conditions, which could lead to frozen doors or dangerous ice buildup while you're driving.

In many parts of the country, just because it's technically springtime doesn't mean the cold weather, ice and snow are done for the year. As in wintry conditions, it is important to avoid driving immediately after salt is spread on roads.



'Summer-ize' Your Car

The summer heat can be downright damaging to your car's engine and peripheral systems. What you do about it now — before the temperatures rise — can make or break your chances of avoiding costly repairs.

The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence has some advice for drivers this spring who are looking to prepare their vehicles for the summer heat. Remember that every automobile is different, but there are some basics to follow for ultimate protection.

- Read the owner's manual and follow the recommended service schedules.

- Obviously, any issue with your cooling system should be checked ahead of the heat. It could need a simple adjustment or perhaps an entire replacement. Either way, you'll want to have it checked now to be safe.

- Have a certified technician check any issues related to rough idling or stalling. The last thing you want to happen is to be stuck in the middle of the summer heat with a car that won't start.

- Flush and refill the cooling system according to your service manual's recommendations. Even if it's not time for a flush, always keep a close eye on the level, condition and concentration of the coolant.

- Have your belts and hoses checked by a qualified technician for tightness and overall quality.

- Change the oil and oil filter as specified in the owner's manual. Always remember to properly dispose of used oil when performing an oil change yourself.

- Replace worn wiper blades and keep plenty of washer solvent on hand to combat summer's dust and insects.

- Check the condition of tires, including the spare. Always check tire pressure when the tires are cold.

- Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs.



Tire Care

Neglecting to take care of your tires is akin to doing the same to your feet and legs. After too much inattention, you simply won't be able to move.

And while replacing your tires every 40,000 to 50,000 miles is recommended, it isn't the only responsibility you have as a car owner to protect yourself, your passengers and those who are sharing the road.

TIRE DEPTH ISSUES

Thin tire treads create hazardous driving conditions when water builds up on the roadway. It can cause the tire to hydroplane, which is what occurs when the tire rides up on a film of water and loses contact with the road.

Check your tire tread depth with a penny. Insert the penny into the grooves of the tread. If you can see all of Abraham Lincoln's head, the tire needs to be immediately removed and replaced.

For budgeting purposes, don't wait until spring to do your penny test. Spotting a potential issue in the fall could help you prepare your finances accordingly for when you need new tires in the spring.

CHECKING TIRE PRESSURE

It is important for drivers to check their car's tire pressure monthly to prevent uneven tire wear and failure. A new study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that cars with tires underinflated by more than 25 percent are three times more likely to be involved in a crash related to tire problems than a car with proper inflation.

Additionally, tires underinflated up to 25 percent run the risk of overheating, which can lead to rapid failure. Many newer models are equipped with tire pressure sensors, which will alert you to any potential loss of air.

Even drivers of these automobiles should still manually check their tire pressure, as another NHTSA study found that only 57 percent of vehicles with tire-pressure monitoring systems had tires that were properly inflated.

For other tires, you can simply and effectively check your tires' air pressure with a gauge. Know how many pounds per square inch (PSI) are recommended for each tire. (This information is usually labeled on the wall of the tire.)



Windshield Care

Your windshield is your window to the driving world. Keeping it clean and clear will help you reach your destination safely, while a dirty one can serve as a dangerous detriment to your driving performance.

From bug buildup to cracks in the glass, there are a number of factors that can cause obstructed views through your windshield. It is up to you to identify and resolve them.

WIPER BLADES

Worn wiper blades are one of the most dangerous flaws your vehicle can have, especially when the springtime rain begins.

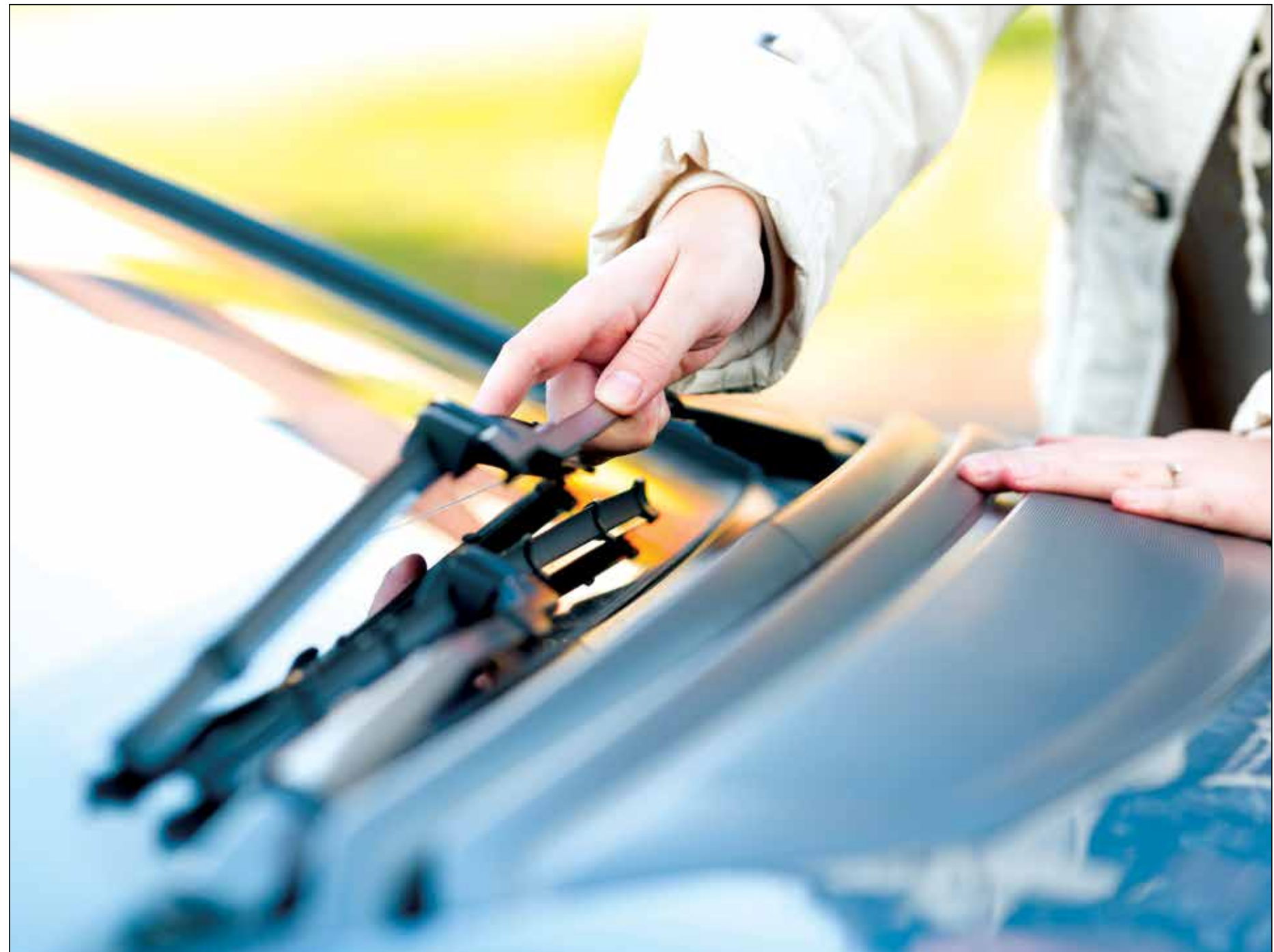
Wipers can malfunction in a number of ways or even stop working altogether. The most common issue with wipers is a worn blade.

Luckily, replacing them is both easy and inexpensive. Car care experts recommend that you replace both at the same time.

If you're not confident in your ability to effectively install new wipers, check with your local auto parts store to find out if they offer free installation. Many of them do, which can give you peace of mind that they are installed correctly.

CRACKS

A lot of us have experienced the cracking windshield. You're driving down the road when a rock flies up and dings the glass. The chip turns into a small crack, which then



turns into a large spider web crack.

If you're going to drive the car before you repair the windshield, be sure the crack

isn't impeding your line of sight.

Windshield crack repair kits are sold in the auto parts departments of many local

and big box stores. If applied correctly, these acrylic adhesive and filler options are great for repairing small chips or cracks. If the damage to

your car is more severe, a trip to the auto glass shop may be in your future. Whatever route you decide to take, it is important to put safety first.

Maximizing Resale Value

The springtime is perfect for car owners looking to upgrade their ride. Dealerships are often hot spots for deep discounts on both new and used cars.

But don't forget about sprucing up the one you'll be trading in. You can get more money out of your current car at transaction time if you make sure it's up to par.

Dealerships use resources like Kelley Blue Book or the National Automobile Dealers Association to calculate the worth of your car on the used market.

Obviously, factors such as age and make of your car are out of your control. Some models have great reputations for holding their value, while others may require expensive parts and extensive labor for repair.

While you may not be able to do much to change these dynamics, what you can impact is your car's condition. How you maintain your car over the course of ownership can make a big difference in how much money you can expect when the time comes to trade it in.

CLEANING TIPS

- Carry out a thorough cleaning inside and out every two weeks. This will help keep the interior fabric free of dirt that can fray its color. It also will save your exterior paint finish from being harmed by a build-up of pollutants.

- Fix dings promptly before they turn into rust spots. Just like any other maintenance,



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the quicker you take care of a small issue, the less likely it is that it will snowball into a massive one.

- Park far away from other

cars or shopping carts. This will help you avoid dings or scratches that can require expensive fixes.

- As much as you can, avoid

smoking or eating in your car. Cigarette burns and food stains can drop your car's value in a hurry because the dealership knows it will have to invest

money into repairs to get top-dollar from a buyer.

- Never neglect oil changes, which when done regularly can lengthen the life of your engine.

Caring for Leather Seats

Dull spots. Cracked seams. Worn look. This isn't the condition you anticipated for your car's leather seats, even after years of wear and tear.

Leather is generally beat up by abrasive dirt buildup, as well as its natural loss of essential oils and UV protection over time. This can especially be the case in warmer temperatures.

So how can you make sure your leather doesn't lose its luster? The most tried and true methods of care involve simple, regular maintenance aimed at cleansing and moisturizing the leather.

REGULAR WIPE DOWNS

One of the best ways to retain your leather's natural beauty and shine is by regularly wiping it down with your favorite cleaner. Leather must be carefully cleaned before it can be thoroughly conditioned.

As leather ages, it loses essential protectants that are ingrained during the manufacturing process. You can add this back with a vinyl cleaner applied with a microfiber applicator pad. The pad works to agitate the leather's pores, allowing dirt and body oils to rise to the surface, where it can be wiped off.

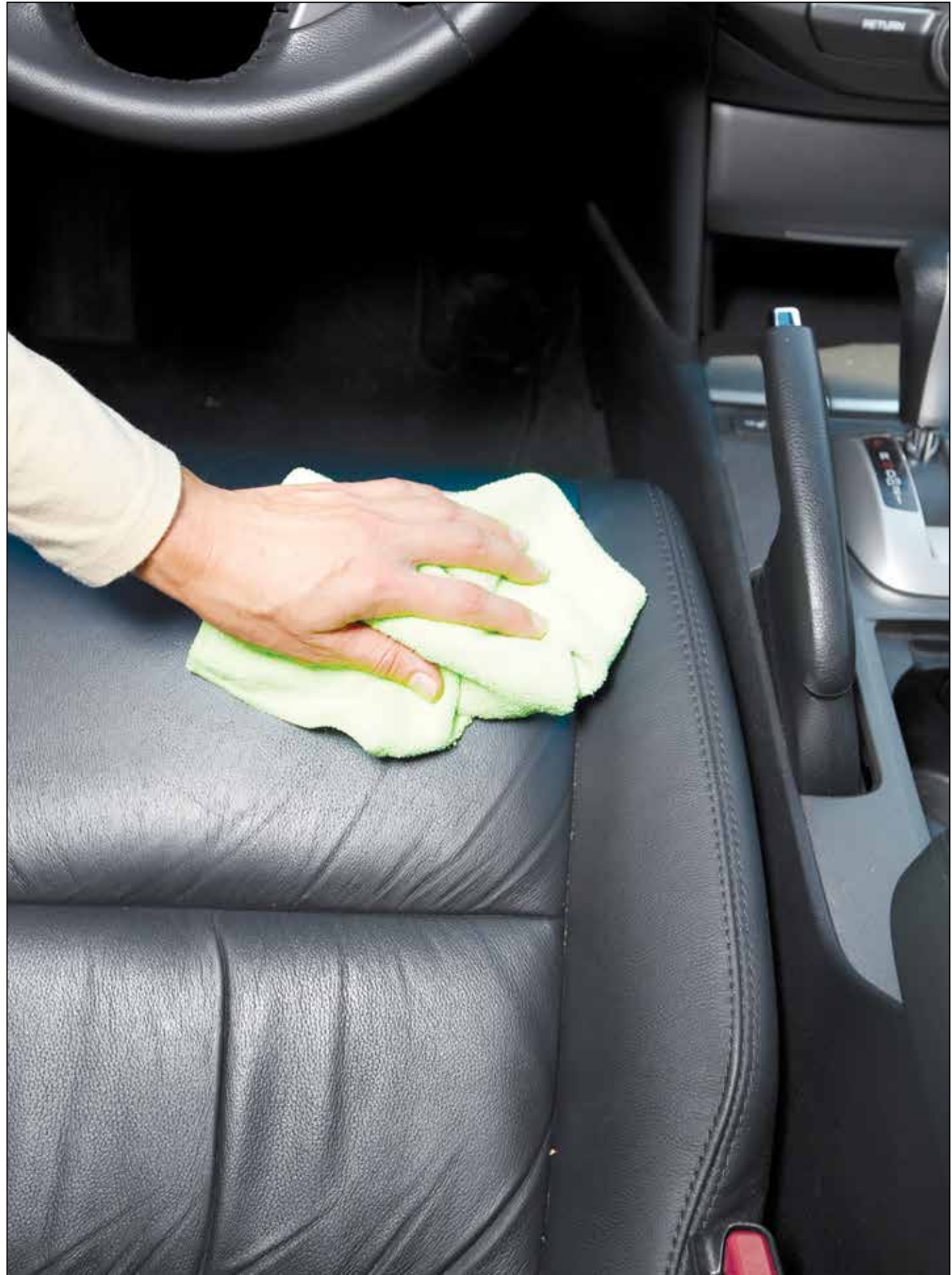
Your car's manufacturer likely recommends a specific product that has been tested and determined most effective, so check the owner's manual for best options.

COMMON SENSE CARE

Remember to keep sharp objects away from your leather seats. One scrape from a pocketknife or poke from a pen can easily damage the soft texture of leather. A torn leather seat will need care from a professional, and depending on the size of the tear, could be an expensive fix.

Another common sense practice is to test leather cleaner on a small portion of the seat. Let the test spot sit for 24 hours and then check it for cracking, wear or discoloration.

Once you have found a cleaner that will work for your leather, it is time to consider a moisturizer and protectant. The combination of the two will keep your leather seats soft and shiny for years to come.



The Art of Waxing

For car-lovers, there aren't many things in life more beautiful than a perfect wax job. The shine and the are enough to make waxing worth your while, let alone the protection it can afford your car.

The newest types of waxes are synthetic polymer based, helping them provide protection that generally lasts more than three months. This time period obviously depends on if you park your car indoors or in a garage, as well as if it has been exposed to a harsh environment.

Considering a spray wax? These are designed for quick application and are generally less durable than liquid or paste waxes. Sprays can, however, be used for a boost between quarterly applications of liquid or paste waxes.

Waxing is not to be confused with polishing, which does not protect your car's finish. Various glazes and polishes can, however, restore the natural oils your paint once had.

WAXING STEPS

- If you want your wax job to hold up, it's important that you first fully wash and dry your car. A completely clean and dry car will take in the wax better than one that isn't.
- Use small, circular strokes with a microfiber pad.
- Work one section of the car at a time.
- Use one side of the pad to cut through the waxy surface.
- Flip the towel over to the clean side to remove any additional residue.

USE MICROFIBER TOWELS

For the gentlest option, use microfiber towels for both drying and waxing your car. Unlike other types of towels, microfiber varieties do not mar the finish or create scratches on the surface.

Be sure to care for your microfiber towels according to their washing instructions. Most require special attention, including being washed separately from other laundry.

Most microfibers are recommended to be washed only with hot water and dried on a low-heat setting.

