

A young woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a blue and white plaid button-down shirt, is smiling and leaning on the hood of a red car. The background is a lush green garden with purple and pink flowers. A white banner with a black border is positioned at the bottom of the image, containing the text 'SPRING CAR CARE'.

# SPRING CAR CARE

# Stock Your Emergency Kit

**D**epending on everything from the weather to potential engine problems, a short trip can turn out to be a whole lot longer than expected.

Drivers can become stranded due to weather, or a vehicle could potentially break down in a remote area. When that happens, you want to be prepared.

## FIRST AID KIT

An unexpected injury could happen on the road, so it could potentially save your life to be prepared with a fully stocked first aid kit. The California Department of Public Health recommends a few basics to keep on hand:

Two pairs of sterile gloves; sterile dressings to stop bleeding; soap and antibiotic towelettes to disinfect; antibiotic ointment to prevent infection; burn ointment to prevent infection; adhesive bandages in a variety of sizes; eye wash solution to flush the eyes; thermometer; prescription medications you take every day (you should periodically rotate medicines to account for expiration dates); prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment and supplies; medicine dropper; First Aid book; and non-prescription drugs (aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever, anti-diarrhea medication, antacid, laxative)

## WINTER SURVIVAL KIT

The Department of Transportation recommends



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items to keep in your vehicle in case of an emergency in the winter:

Several blankets or a sleeping bag and warm clothing, such as parka, boots, long underwear, heavy socks, mittens, ski mask; a source of heat, such as a multiple-wick candle can heater (it is best to also have matches to light your can-

dle, because some lighters won't work in extreme cold); water and a metal container suitable for melting ice or snow to be used for drinking water; a radio and flashlight with extra batteries; something to read to help keep you awake; a folding cup; toilet tissue; bright red or orange cloth and whistle to signal help; and a Nylon rope.

## FOOD

In case you end up stuck in your car for longer than expected, the The California Department of Public Health recommends keeping some food on hand in case it takes some time for help to arrive. Here are some basic tips to follow:

Store at least a three-day

supply of non-perishable food; select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking and little or no water; and pack a manual can opener, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils. Some recommendations include protein or fruit bars, dry cereal or granola, peanut butter, dried fruit and crackers.

# Check Off the Basics

**Y**ou can never fully prevent problems from occurring, but some basic maintenance can go a very long way toward saving you money and keeping your car on the road — and out of the shop.

## GET THE OIL CHANGED

This is arguably one of the biggest ones: Make sure to get your oil changed regularly. Oil circulates through the engine and is responsible for lubricating all the moving parts. Without it, the engine would have too much friction and quickly break down. By having the oil changed regularly, you're ensuring the engine can continue to function. Most vehicles require an oil change every 3,000 to 5,000 miles.

Check your vehicle owner's manual to find out how frequently you should have the oil changed.

## CHECK THE BRAKES

Ensuring your brakes are working properly not only can keep you safe on the road but also can save you money in maintenance. As AllState insurance notes, worn brake pads can lead to broken rotors. Brake rotors are a much more labor-intensive and costly part of the braking system to replace. Regularly checking and replacing your brake pads can greatly prolong the life of the brake rotors.

If you hear a scraping sound when slowing down, that's a telltale sign your brake pads need to be replaced. Your vehicle also



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might vibrate while stopping when the pads are worn out. The brake pad usually can be seen through the wheel. If it seems very thin — less than one-fourth of an inch — it is likely in need of replacement.

## CHECK THE EXHAUST SYSTEM

The exhaust system reduces exhaust noise from the engine. The catalytic converter reduces the level of harmful pollutants in the exhaust. The oxygen sen-

sors mounted in the exhaust system monitor the level of oxygen in the exhaust gases to maintain efficient engine operation and to monitor the converter's operation. It's recommended to maintain a safe car

with regular exhaust system checks. According to CarCare.org, your exhaust system may need to be checked if you hear rattling noise when starting, accelerating or braking, or if you feel drowsy while driving.

# Safely Jump Off Your Car

**T**hough keeping a pair of jumper cables in your car is a good way to start your car if the battery is weak, you also need to know how to use them. If you don't, you could end up hurting yourself and your car.

## WHEN TO JUMP OFF YOUR CAR

Jumper cables don't fix every problem, but if your car won't crank, attempting to jump it off is an easy way to diagnose whether or not you're dealing with a battery issue.

If you've left the lights or some other battery-draining feature on for an extended period of time, and now the vehicle won't crank, it's possible it could be caused by a weak or defective battery. If that's the case, pull out your jumper cables and get to work.

## GET SOME HELP

You'll need another vehicle from which to pull some power, so pull up another vehicle near the one that won't start, positioning the vehicles nose to nose, if possible. Try to get them as close together as possible.

Determine where the batteries are on each vehicle. Some newer models have the battery hidden, and you may need to read the owner's manual to find the location.

## HOOK THEM UP

Make sure both vehicles are turned off and in park. Take your jumper cables and attach one of the red clips to the positive (POS/+) terminal of your battery, and the other red clip to the positive terminal of the other vehicle. Then, attach the other black (NEGATIVE/-) clip to the negative terminal on the other battery, and the final black clip to an unpainted metal surface not near the battery on your car to ground it.

## SEE IF IT WILL START

Start the other vehicle first and let it run for a few minutes, then attempt to crank your car. If it works, keep the engine running and drive for at least 15 minutes to help build up a charge in your battery. You should have the vehicle checked at a repair shop soon.



# Find Hidden Features

**M**ost relatively new cars have a ton of special features baked right in — but many drivers don't actually take the time to figure out how to use all those goodies to their full potential.

## START WITH THE BASICS

It might not make for the most engrossing read, but pull your owner's manual out of the glove box and dig in for some light research. A good place to start is with the radio/navigation/Bluetooth section. Many newer cars have built-in navigation and Bluetooth features. Take a bit of time to figure out how to use them. Most new cars also come with a free trial for satellite radio service. If the vehicle is equipped, make a call to the service provider and see if you're eligible for a free trial.

Even if you know the basics of how your car's technology works, you can still find a "hidden" feature you never actually knew was there.

From controlling streaming music over Bluetooth to changing interior settings (such as lights, etc.) to fit your preference, you might be able to do a whole lot more than you thought.

## USE WHAT YOU HAVE

You might know what your car can do, but have you actually taken the time to set it all up so it works? Many cars offer voice dialing, and several newer cars can even read and respond to texts or e-mails via voice command. Go the extra step and down-



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load your phonebook through the Bluetooth phone service, and make sure you're taking complete advantage of those features. If your vehicle has navigation, open up those settings and take a few moments to set up the basics

(such as entering your home address), which can save you time later. Some vehicles also have features such as keyless entry keypads, which can be configured to provide an additional level of access and convenience.

Even if you know the basics, you can still find a "hidden" feature you never actually knew was there.

# High-Tech Upgrades

If you're driving an older vehicle, that doesn't mean you have to be left out in the cold when it comes to the high-tech features loaded into newer cars.

With a relatively small investment, and a bit of time, you can give your older vehicle many of the bells and whistles typically reserved for those 2015 models. What better way to make your old car feel new, again?

## GET YOUR CAR CONNECTED

One of the biggest upgrades you can make to an older vehicle is to install a media center. If you plan to keep that older car a while longer but still really want some of the cooler features, this is the first place you should start.

Car radio systems include tons of features these days, including Bluetooth connections, touch-screen functionality, phone syncing and navigation. There are several different models out there, and they all have their own pros and cons. Two of the biggest platforms on the market are Apple's CarPlay and Android Auto, which are based on the Apple and Google phone operating systems, respectively. Your best bet is to go with something that will work best with your cell phone system of choice.

Some high-end systems could run between \$500 and \$1,000, but it still beats the price tag of a brand new car.



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## KEYLESS ENTRY AND REMOTE START

Conversion kits are available for many older model vehicles to add keyless entry and remote start systems. Prices vary depending on the base model and age of the vehicle, and unless you're experienced

with customizing vehicles, you may want to consider having a professional install the kit. Going beyond that, kits are also available to add power windows and locks. These features can be extremely convenient for owners, and depending on the model, might not make for

an extremely expensive investment.

## MOVE BEYOND FM AND AM

This one is typically very affordable, and very easy. A basic satellite radio conversion kit can be added to virtually

any car, providing access to satellite radio service. Of course, this also requires a subscription fee, but if you spend a lot of time driving, it can be well worth the cost to have access to news, sports, music and lifestyle programming while driving.

# Remove Winter Salt

Spring cleaning your vehicle is a great time to clean off road salt that has built up from the winter.

In parts of the country with freezing temperatures during the winter, road crews often use salt to prevent snow and sleet from freezing completely and creating ice on the roads.

Salt lowers water's freezing point, causing any ice already formed to melt even though the air temperature might remain below freezing. Mixing the salt with sand helps keep the salt in place, while also helping with traction.

## THE DOWNSIDE

Though salting a road can help keep it passable, it can have a major negative impact on your vehicle. All that salt can start to eat away at your vehicle and can cause major problems. If left unchecked, it can cause body and undercarriage damage.

## WHAT TO DO

DMV.org recommends some tips to help keep your car in working order, even on the saltiest of roads:

- In late autumn, thoroughly wash every inch of your vehicle, including the underside.
- Apply a meticulous coat of wax, followed by a wax sealant to help keep the wax adhered to the vehicle's paint.
- Seal the undercarriage, paying closest attention to the brake and fuel lines, as these



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are the most susceptible items for rust and corrosion and make your vehicle unsafe if they fail. You can buy a product to do this, or you can have it done professionally.

- Take your vehicle to the car wash as often as possible.

Many car washes in the “snow belt” offer steam cleaning and undercarriage cleaning as well as a traditional wash.

- Have your car re-waxed and sealed when you have it washed.
- Use a good quality spray

protectant on all exterior rubber or vinyl surfaces. It may be best to spray with an applicator instead of spraying the product directly onto the surface. This will avoid any overspray onto the paint.

- After a winter washing,

apply an additional coat of wax to all exposed metal, using a hand-held hairdryer to warm the metal surface a bit before applying the wax. Warm your buffing rag, too, to help the wax better adhere to the cold metal.

# Grip the Road in the Rain

**A**s far as wear and tear is concerned, the rubber on the road takes the brunt of it. It's highly recommended you perform a periodic check to make sure your tires are in safe condition.

Winter and fall can often be cold and wet, so make sure your tires are up to the task.

## CHECK THE AIR PRESSURE

To check the air pressure in your tires, you'll need to purchase a pressure gauge. Insert the tire pressure gauge into the valve stem on your tire. If using a "pencil" gauge, the stick will pop out and report the pressure. A digital gauge should start reading out almost immediately.

Compare the measured PSI (pounds per square inch) to the PSI found on the sticker inside the driver's door of your vehicle or in the owner's manual. If your PSI is too high, release air until it matches. If it's low, add air until it reaches the proper number.

## PERFORM A PENNY TEST

The U.S. Department of Transportation recommends replacing tires when they reach 2/32-inch tread, and some states legally require tires to be replaced at this depth. The "penny test" can be used to check whether you've hit the 2/32-inch threshold.

As Bridgestone Tire notes, place a penny between the tread ribs on your tire. A "rib" refers to the raised portion of tread that spans the circum-



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ference of your tire. Tire tread is composed of several ribs.

Turn the penny so that Lincoln's head points down into the tread.

See if the top of his head disappears between the ribs. If it does, your tread is still above 2/32-inch. If you can

see Lincoln's entire head, it may be time to replace the tire because your tread is no longer deep enough.

Winter and fall can often be cold and wet, so make sure your tires are up to the task.

When performing the test, remember not only to check each tire but to check various places around each tire. Pay

special attention to areas that look the most worn. Replace the tire when any areas of the tire fail the test.