

Fall Car Care



Summer Gas vs. Winter Gas

As gas prices soared in 2022, you may have heard experts and commentators talk about summer gas and winter gas.

It has nothing to do with when the gas was produced and everything to do with how the gas was produced.

The regulation of the volatility of gasoline blends, giving us summer and winter gas, started in 1989 just before the Clean Air Act took effect.

Gasoline vapor from more volatile blends contributes to ground-level ozone, which is bad news for the environment and for human health. Ozone can cause smog and respiratory problems, including coughing and chest pains.

Highly volatile blends also damaged cars when the gas vaporized before it reached the fuel pump, causing the engine to stop running.

SUMMER GAS

Summer gas has a lower volatility than winter-grade gas. This limits emissions that increase with warm weather and cause unhealthy levels of ozone in the atmosphere. It costs refiners more to make summer gas, the U.S. Energy Information Administration says, and that, along with increased demand, is why fuel usually costs more in the summer. The transition to summer gas usually rolls out gradually in the spring as



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temperatures rise. Federally mandated dates for summer gas are May 1 to Sept. 15 for refiners and terminals and June 1 to Sept. 15 for retailers.

RFG

Some areas of the country require an even cleaner grade

of gasoline called reformulated gasoline. The EPA requires the use of RFG in high-smog areas to reduce smog-forming particulates and pollutants. Some states, such as California, also have more strict regulations on gasoline and requires RFG. This newer

gas is required in 16 states and the District of Columbia, where it cleans up the air breathed by about 75 million people, according to the EPA.

WINTER GAS

Winter gas is more volatile, meaning it's easier to start your

car in colder temperatures.

It's cheaper than both summer gas and RFG and typically leads to lower fuel prices in the colder months.

This fuel blend usually contains more butane, which is what causes it to be more volatile.



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Adjusting Tire Pressure

Most modern cars have a warning light that your tire pressure might be low, but you may see other signs that you need to check your tire pressure.

This includes poor handling, lower gas mileage and uneven wear on the treads.

HOW TO CHECK YOUR TIRE PRESSURE

You can get a digital tire gauge at your local auto parts store for around \$10. Find your car's required pressure levels. This is usually on a sticker in

the driver's side door and should also be in your car's owners manual. You may need to inflate the front and rear tires to different pressures, so pay attention.

Make sure to check the pressure when the tires are cold, meaning your car has been sitting for a while, at least half an hour after your last trip. First thing in the morning is a great time to

check your tire pressure. Take off the valve cap and keep it somewhere safe. Press the tire gauge onto the valve stem and read the tire pressure. Compare your reading to the numbers on the sticker and fill the tires with air. It is estimated that for every three psi below the specifications, you burn 1% more fuel and add 10% more tire wear. That adds up.

FILLING YOUR TIRES

Find an air compressor, either by buying one at your local auto parts store or stopping by the local gas station, which may have a coin-operated

compressor you can use. Pull up as close as you can to the compressor so that the hose will reach all four tires. Remove the stem caps and keep them safe, then turn on the compressor. Press the hose fitting down on the valve stem and press the lever on the compressor hose. You should hear and feel air going into the tire.

Use your tire gauge or the gauge on the hose to tell when you have the right pressure. If the tires are warm from your drive to the gas station, inflate three psi over the sticker amount. Replace the valve caps and you're good to go.

Oil Changes 101

The old rule of thumb was to change your oil every 3,000 miles, but with advances in automotive technology, that's changing to 5,000, 7,000 or even 10,000 miles.

Don't go by what you learned way back when. Check your owner's manual and follow its instructions for how often to change your oil.

CHECKING YOUR OIL LEVEL

Between oil changes, it's a good idea to regularly check your oil level as your car may need to be topped off, even if it's newer. Check the owner's manual and follow its instructions for checking your oil. Traditionally, you check it with a dipstick, but some newer cars have a sensor that monitors the oil level for you.

To check your oil using a dipstick, park on level ground and, with the engine off, open the hood. Find the dipstick and pull it out. Wipe any oil from the end, then insert the dipstick back into its tube. Push it all the way in, then pull it out and look at the dipstick to see where the oil is. There should be some indication of how much oil your car needs, like a low and high line or an area of cross-hatching. If the top of the oil is between those marks, you're OK. If it's below the minimum,



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you need to add oil.

The oil you see should appear brown or black. A lighter color could mean you have a coolant leak and any metal particles could indicate engine damage.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT OIL

Again, turn to your owners

manual for guidance. Don't pay more for synthetic blends if you don't need it. The weight of oil that you need may be printed on the cap where you add oil, and it's definitely in your owners manual. If you have an older car that's running well, don't go out and buy a specialty oil just because it's

old. Keep doing what you're doing, with regular maintenance, until your car or your mechanic signals you should stop.

SYNTHETIC OILS

Synthetic oil may be required for some cars, but for some it's not, so you should

always check before you get your oil changed. It's designed to be more effective at resisting breakdown and higher temperatures, meaning it lasts longer. If you live somewhere that experiences temperature extremes or if you make a lot of short trips, you may want to consider a synthetic oil.

Paying for a Car Detail

There's nothing like that new car feeling. If you're not in the market, the closest you can get is a clean car feeling from a thorough detailing.

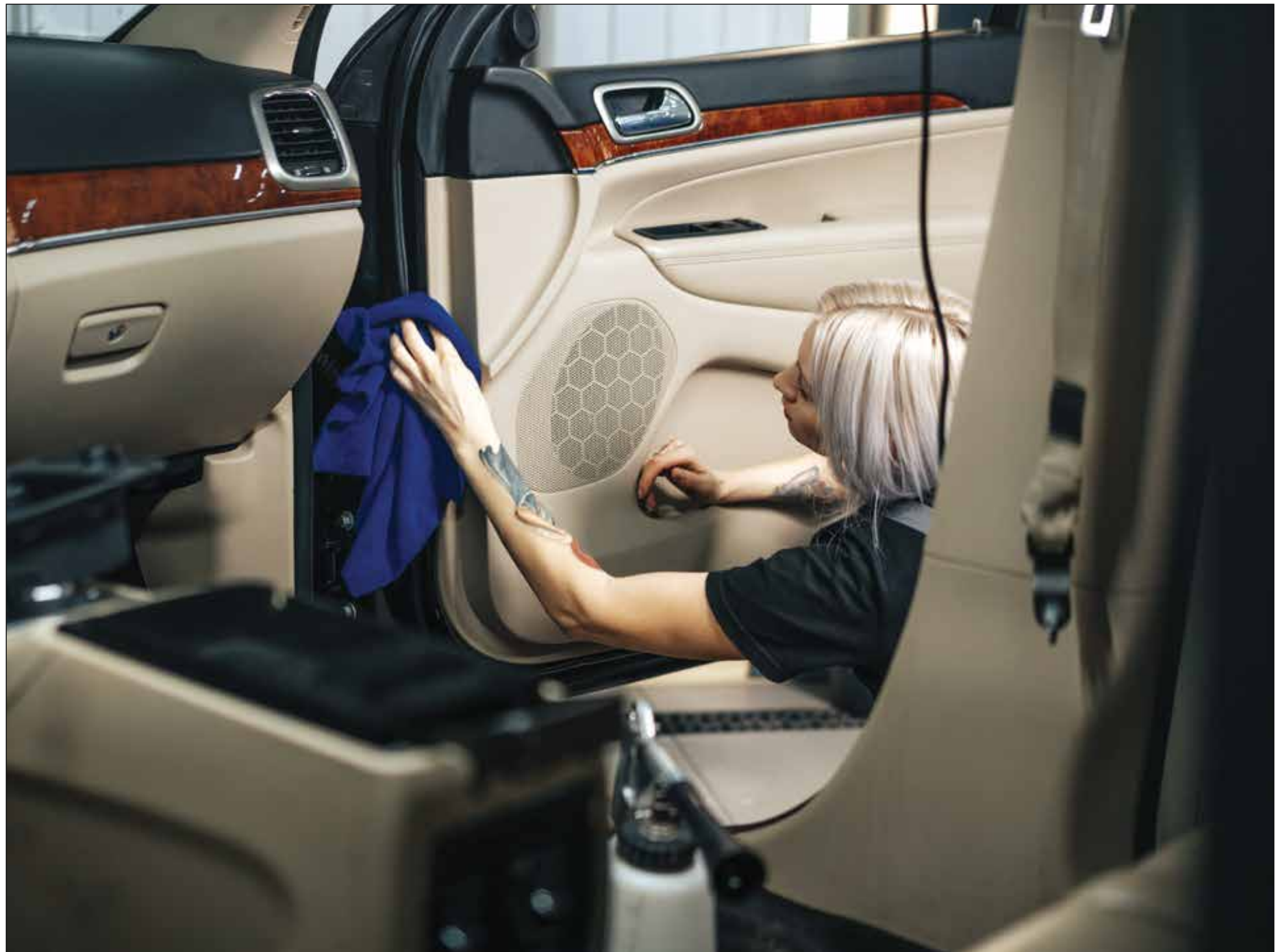
You have options of pulling out the supplies and doing it all yourself or hiring a pro to do it for you. Keep reading to help you decide which is better for you.

HOW IS A CAR DETAILING DIFFERENT FROM A CAR WASH?

A car wash removes dirt and grime from the outside of the car. A good detail will clean the car inside and out, and also give attention to minor imperfections on the body and interior, leaving your car showroom ready. Depending on the package you get from your detailer, it may also include cleaning under the hood and the bottom of the car.

PROTECTING YOUR INVESTMENT

A good car detail removes harmful substances from your car's exterior paint but it can also extend the life of your car. The polish, wax and other products use add a layer of protection to your car's surfaces. Not only will it leave the detailer clean and shiny, but also protected. Rubber gaskets and seals are also



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cleaned and polished, protecting them from drying out and cracking. Inside, leather, plastic and vinyl surfaces are also cleaned and conditioned, prolonging their useful life as well.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Your basic car wash can run

as little as \$10 for the drive-through variety, but detailing is going to hit you in the wallet. Depending on the size and condition of your vehicle, it can cost between \$100-\$300. However, the value it brings to properly cleaning and protecting your vehicle may be worth it, particularly if you live in an area where your car is sub-

jected to corrosives such as salt on the roads or from the ocean.

FINDING A PROFESSIONAL DETAILER

Ask friends and family for recommendations on car detailing near you. You may have to drop your vehicle off

for a day or two to get the best service, or you may be able to find a mobile detailing service that will meet you at your office or home. If you choose to have your car detailed in your work's parking lot, try to get other people to join you. The detailer may give your group a discount if they get a full day's work in one place.

Checking Fluid Levels

There are six different fluids under the hood that you should be checking regularly (or having checked by your dealership or service shop).

They are the engine oil, coolant, power steering fluid, brake fluid, transmission fluid and windshield wiper fluid.

WINDSHIELD WIPER FLUID

Washer fluid is critical to safe driving because it keeps your windshield clean and free of obstructions. You can buy jugs of ready-made wiper fluid at any gas station or auto parts store. Find the reservoir under the hood that has the windshield wiper symbol on it and make sure the fluid is topped off, especially before any long trips. Consult your owners manual for more information.

TRANSMISSION FLUID

Transmission fluid lubricates and cools the gears, clutches and valves in your transmission. Many transmissions nowadays come with a lifetime fluid that never needs replacing. But bad transmission fluid can cause rough shifting, strange noises and uncontrolled engine surges. Troubleshooting these are other transmission issues should always start with the transmission fluid. Some cars have a dipstick, but many



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newer models require a mechanic's help. Check your owners manual before attempting this one yourself.

BRAKE FLUID

Modern cars have hydraulic brakes, and those brakes need fluid to connect the pedal to the braking mechanism. Over time, brake fluid can become contaminated with water, causing your brake lines to rust. Leaking brake fluid can cause spongy pedals and irregular braking. Look in your owners manual to find the location of your brake fluid reservoir and

check its level and color. Brake fluid comes in many colors, but it should all be translucent, not cloudy or dark. Add more brake fluid that's compatible with your car if the level is low.

POWER STEERING FLUID

Today's steering systems are hydraulic like your brakes, meaning they use fluid to make steering easier. You'll find a dipstick or reservoir under the hood near the engine. Remove the dipstick and check the markings or look for the lines on the reservoir. If your fluid is low, top it off with the type

specified in your owners manual. Adding fluid frequently may be a sign of a leak that you should get checked out by a professional.

COOLANT

This is also known as anti-freeze. It absorbs engine heat and dissipates it through your car's radiator. You only have to check antifreeze every 50,000 miles or so unless you have a leak or other issue. Never check your coolant while the engine is hot. Look in your owners manual for instructions on how to check the cool-

ant in your vehicle.

ENGINE OIL

You're probably familiar with having the oil changed in your car. The oil keeps your engine running smoothly. To check your oil, wait for the engine to cool, then locate your engine's dipstick. Remove it, wipe it clean with a rag, and then put the dipstick back. Pull it back out again and check that the oil level matches the indicators on the stick. You should also check the color, which should be yellow or amber. Touch the oil. It should feel slick and not gritty.

Winterizing Your Car

When temperatures start to fall, it's time to get your vehicle ready for the winter.

Winterizing your car protects your investment and keeps you and your family safe, particularly in the event of snow or ice.

TIRES

Your tires are key to keeping you safe on slick roads. The more tread you have left, the better performance you're going to get, especially on wintry roads. Check the tread on your tires by putting a penny into the grooves between the treads. Have President Abraham Lincoln's head facing you and upside down. Check all around the tire, making sure you can't see all of his head. If you can, your tread is dangerously low and you need to get new tires.

While you're checking your tread, also check your air pressure. There should be a sticker on the driver's side door or trunk lid that tells you the appropriate pressure for your vehicle. The best time to check your tire pressure is when the car has been sitting for at least 30 minutes.

BATTERY

Batteries don't like cold weather. Chemical reactions make the battery slow down as the temperature drops, so make sure you have a fresh battery before the weather gets wintry. You can have your



battery checked for free at many auto parts stores.

CHECK YOUR AWD OR 4WD SYSTEMS

If your vehicle has all-wheel drive or four-wheel drive, this

could be a great tool for navigating winter roads.

That system needs maintenance, too, and if you haven't used it all summer, check your owners manual to see what needs to be done and how to

use the system.

CHANGE YOUR WIPER BLADES AND FLUIDS

Make sure you can see clearly, even in ice or snow. Change out your wiper blades

if you see streaks on the windshield or if the rubber on the wipers is dry and brittle. Check your windshield wiper fluid and other fluids to make sure they won't freeze in colder temperatures.

Caring for Leather Seats

Leather seats are a luxurious addition to your car that are also easier to clean than fabric seats in some instances. They do, however, require special care to keep them looking their best.

Keep reading to find out how to properly care for the leather surfaces in your car.

CLEAN IT UP

The first step to cleaning your leather seats is to vacuum up any loose dirt and other debris. Use a heavy-duty shop vacuum and get all the dirt out of cracks and crevices. If you can, stick the vacuum nozzle into the crease between the seating surfaces and back surfaces to thoroughly clean the entire seat.

FIND A CLEANER

Next, you'll need to apply a cleaning solution. Not just any household cleaner will work, though. Avoid solutions that contain bleach or ammonia, which can damage the leather. You can find commercial leather cleaners at the auto shop or you can make your own by mixing liquid dish soap or Castile soap with water at five parts water to one part soap. Wash the leather surfaces with a microfiber



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cloth, being careful not to saturate the leather surfaces with too much solution. Leather can get moldy if not properly dried.

DRY THE LEATHER

Dry off the leather surfaces with a clean microfiber cloth, getting as much of the mois-

ture out as you can. It's important not to leave your seats and other surfaces wet for too long because it can warp the leather and cause it to crack. You should complete this whole process at least once a month or more often if your car gets heavy usage from kids and pets.

CONDITION THE LEATHER

As an added protection, apply a leather conditioner evenly to seats and other leather surfaces. This will keep the leather moist and may have added UV protection to keep it from fading. Let the leather sit for four to six hours

after applying – or whatever the label on your conditioner recommends – before using the vehicle to allow the leather to absorb the conditioner. Wipe off any excess with a clean microfiber cloth. Aim to condition your leather surfaces once every three to six months.