

# Spring Car Care



# Cleaning the Undercarriage

The undercarriage is one of the most overlooked parts of a vehicle, yet it faces some of the harshest conditions — especially during winter.

Road salt, sand, slush and grime accumulate underneath the car throughout the colder months, and if they aren't removed in spring, they can lead to rust, corrosion and damage to essential components.

## WHY WINTER BUILDUP CAUSES DAMAGE

Winter road treatments improve safety, but they expose vehicles to corrosive materials. Salt is particularly harmful because it speeds up the chemical reaction that causes metal to rust. When salt mixes with moisture, it creates an environment where corrosion spreads more quickly. Sand and dirt trap moisture against the metal for longer periods, accelerating rust even further.

The undercarriage houses important parts such as brake lines, exhaust components, suspension parts, fuel lines and the vehicle frame. Corrosion in any of these areas can lead to costly repairs. Spring's warmer, wetter weather can worsen the problem as leftover salt reactivates when exposed to rain or humidity.

## HOW TO INSPECT THE UNDERCARRIAGE

A spring inspection can help identify early signs of corrosion before damage spreads. You can start with a visual check by safely raising the vehicle with ramps or a jack and stands. Use a flash-



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light to look for:

- Orange or brown discoloration.
- Flaking or peeling metal.
- Damp spots that might trap moisture.
- Accumulated dirt, salt or gravel.

Pay special attention to brake lines and fuel lines, which are especially vulnerable. The wheel wells, frame rails and exhaust system are common rust spots. If you notice deep rust, holes or structural concerns, a mechanic should examine the vehicle right away.

## CLEANING THE UNDERCARRIAGE PROPERLY

Once winter debris is identified, the next step is a thorough cleaning. Many car washes offer undercarriage spray options, which can be effective for

routine maintenance. However, a more complete cleaning at home or by a professional can help reach areas those washes may miss.

Using a garden hose with high pressure or a pressure washer, spray the underside of the car in slow, sweeping motions. Focus on crevices, joints and the backs of wheel wells where salt tends to collect. Avoid using extremely high pressure directly on sensitive components such as rubber bushings, electrical connectors or seals.

For stubborn buildup, using a long-handled brush with mild detergent can break up packed dirt and grime. Rinse thoroughly to ensure no suds or residue remain. Allow the vehicle to dry fully before driving or parking in an enclosed space to reduce

the chance of moisture settling on metal surfaces.

## PROTECTING AGAINST FUTURE CORROSION

After cleaning, some drivers apply rust-inhibiting sprays or protective coatings. These products help create a barrier between metal surfaces and moisture. Professional rustproofing or undercoating services can provide long-lasting protection, especially for vehicles driven frequently on winter roads.

Regular undercarriage rinses throughout the winter season can help minimize future corrosion. Even a quick spray every few weeks can reduce the amount of salt that builds up underneath the vehicle.

# Battery Health After Winter

Cold weather can be tough on vehicle batteries, and many drivers don't notice the strain until warm weather arrives.

Winter temperatures slow the chemical reactions inside a battery and make it harder for the engine to turn over. By spring, a weakened battery may still work but could be close to failing, especially once summer heat begins placing new demands on the system. Checking battery health now can help prevent breakdowns and keep your car running smoothly through the warmer months.

## WHY WINTER IS HARD ON BATTERIES

Vehicle batteries rely on chemical energy to power the starter motor and electrical systems. Cold temperatures reduce a battery's overall capacity and slow its ability to deliver power. During winter, engines require more energy to start, meaning the battery must work harder at a time when it is already under stress.

Short trips in winter add even more strain. When the engine doesn't run long enough, the alternator has less time to recharge the battery. Accessories like the heater, defroster and headlights draw extra power, leaving the battery with fewer opportunities to recover between drives.

Even if a battery survives the



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winter, its internal components may have weakened. Corrosion on terminals, minor voltage drops and reduced reserve capacity can affect performance as temperatures rise.

## SIGNS YOUR BATTERY MAY NEED ATTENTION

Subtle changes often indicate a battery is starting to fail. Slow engine cranking, dim headlights or interior lights that

flicker when the car starts are common warning signs. Electronics such as the radio, touchscreen or power windows may behave inconsistently.

If you experience clicking noises when turning the key or see dashboard battery warnings, the battery may be struggling to hold a charge. Some issues can be related to the charging system or alternator, so it's important to check

the entire electrical system if symptoms persist.

## HOW TO CHECK BATTERY CAPACITY IN SPRING

Testing your battery after winter is one of the simplest ways to prevent unexpected failures. Many auto parts stores offer free battery tests that measure cold cranking amps and voltage to determine whether the battery is still per-

forming within a healthy range.

If you prefer to check at home, a multimeter can provide basic information. A fully charged battery should read around 12.6 volts when the car is off. Anything significantly lower may indicate reduced capacity or a battery that is failing to hold a charge.

Inspect the battery visually. Look for corrosion on the terminals, loose cables, bulging sides or cracks in the casing. Cleaning corrosion with a battery-safe brush and tightening connections can help improve performance.

## PREPARING FOR SUMMER HEAT

Summer heat can be just as hard on a battery as winter cold. High temperatures accelerate internal corrosion and can evaporate electrolyte fluid in non-sealed batteries. A weak or aging battery that survived winter may fail quickly once heat sets in.

To prepare for warmer weather, ensure the battery is securely mounted and that terminals are clean and coated lightly with dielectric grease to slow corrosion. Some vehicles have protective covers that help shield the battery from engine heat; make sure they are properly in place.

If your battery is more than three to five years old, consider replacing it as a preventive measure. Heat, vibration and seasonal stress all shorten battery life, and proactive replacement can help avoid being stranded later in the summer.

# Ensuring Safe Visibility

Spring weather often brings sudden downpours, misty mornings and fluctuating temperatures that can make it harder to see the road clearly.

Poor visibility is one of the leading contributors to warm-season driving accidents, but a few simple maintenance steps can help keep your windshield, windows and mirrors as clear as possible.

## MAKE GLASS MORE WATER REPELLENT

Water-repellent glass treatments can make a significant difference during heavy rain. These products create a protective coating that helps water bead up and roll off the surface more quickly. When applied correctly, they improve visibility by reducing the amount of water that clings to the glass, especially at higher speeds.

Applying a glass treatment typically involves cleaning the windshield thoroughly, applying the product in circular motions and buffing off any residue. Most treatments last several weeks before needing a reapplication. Some drivers choose to apply water-repellent coatings to side windows or mirrors for added clarity.

Using a high-quality windshield washer fluid designed for rainy conditions can help. These fluids cut through



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pollen, bugs and grime that accumulate during the spring season, keeping the windshield clear during unexpected showers.

## EFFECTIVE DEFOGGING STRATEGIES

Fogged windows are a common problem during spring when cool mornings and warmer afternoons create shifting interior and exterior temperatures. Proper defogging helps restore visibility

quickly.

Turning on the defroster with cool or slightly warm air directs airflow onto the windshield and side windows, helping balance temperatures and remove moisture. Using the air conditioner, even at a low setting, helps pull humidity from the air inside the vehicle.

Avoid using recirculation mode when windows fog up. Recirculating the air traps moisture inside, making fogging worse. Instead, switch to

the fresh air setting so the system can draw in drier outside air.

Keeping the interior clean also helps reduce fog buildup. Dust, fingerprints and residue can hold moisture and make fogging more noticeable. Wiping windows with a microfiber cloth and a streak-free cleaner improves clarity.

## KEEPING MIRRORS CLEAR AND FUNCTIONAL

Side mirrors play an impor-

tant role in overall visibility, especially in rain. Water droplets can distort reflections or obscure approaching vehicles. Applying a water-repellent treatment to mirrors helps keep raindrops from sticking, much like on the windshield.

Some vehicles are equipped with heated mirrors, which are especially helpful during spring's cooler, damp mornings. If your vehicle has this feature, activating it can clear condensation quickly.

# Spotting Early Signs of Rust

Rust can develop quietly on a vehicle long before it becomes obvious. Catching corrosion early helps prevent costly repairs and keeps your car looking and functioning its best.

With spring rains, melting snow and leftover road salt creating ideal conditions for corrosion, this is a smart time to look for the earliest warning signs. Knowing where rust appears, how to stop it and when to call a professional can help extend the life of your vehicle.

## WHERE RUST USUALLY APPEARS FIRST

Rust tends to form in areas exposed to moisture, salt and road debris. The undercarriage is one of the most common places for corrosion to begin because it takes the brunt of mud, slush and winter road treatments. Brake lines, exhaust components and frame rails are especially vulnerable.

Wheel wells and fender edges are frequent trouble spots. Dirt and salt can collect along the inner lip of the fender, slowly wearing away protective coatings and exposing metal. Door bottoms often trap water, especially when drain holes become clogged. When moisture cannot escape, it sits inside the door and



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gradually corrodes the metal from the inside out.

Other early rust locations include rocker panels, around windshield edges, the trunk floor and areas where paint has chipped. Any exposed metal can begin corroding quickly once the protective finish is compromised.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY EARLY RUST

Early rust usually appears as

small bubbles under the paint surface. These bubbles indicate moisture has worked its way beneath the paint and is beginning to oxidize the metal. Surface rust may appear as light discoloration or tiny orange spots.

Flaking paint, rough patches or areas that feel gritty to the touch are additional warning signs. Rust often spreads underneath the paint long before it becomes visible, so

small changes in texture can signal a bigger problem developing beneath the surface.

Underneath the vehicle, rust may look like flaking metal, scaling or reddish-brown patches. Using a flashlight during your inspection can help you spot areas of concern more easily.

## HOW TO STOP RUST IN ITS EARLY STAGES

When rust is caught early,

stopping it is often straightforward. Surface rust can usually be sanded away with fine-grit sandpaper. Once the area is smooth, applying a rust converter helps neutralize any remaining oxidation. After that, a primer and matching touch-up paint protect the metal from moisture.

For slightly deeper rust where the metal has begun to pit, you may need a more thorough cleanup. Removing all the affected material is crucial to prevent rust from returning.

Rust-inhibiting primers and sealants can help reinforce the repair and slow future corrosion.

Regular car washes, especially during spring when leftover salt remains on the roads, are one of the best ways to prevent rust from forming. Washing the undercarriage reduces buildup that accelerates corrosion.

## WHEN TO SEE A PROFESSIONAL

If rust has caused bubbling over a wide area, created holes or reached structural components, it is time to seek help from a professional. Advanced rust can compromise the frame, brake lines or suspension parts, making the vehicle unsafe.

Auto body shops have the tools and expertise to safely remove significant rust and restore the affected areas. They can assess whether the damage is cosmetic or structural and recommend the appropriate repairs.

# Resetting Car Tech After Winter

Winter can be hard on vehicles, and modern cars rely on a range of sensors and tech features that may need attention once the weather warms.

Cold temperatures, road salt, moisture and grime can interfere with cameras, GPS systems and safety sensors. Taking time to reset and recalibrate these features in the spring helps ensure they function properly and keeps you safer on the road.

## RECALIBRATING SENSORS FOR SPRING DRIVING

Advanced driver assistance systems rely on sensors placed around the vehicle. These include parking sensors, blind spot detectors, collision avoidance systems and lane departure alerts. Winter conditions often cover or disrupt these sensors with ice, slush or debris, which can lead to false alerts or reduced performance.

Start by giving your car a thorough wash, making sure to clean around bumpers, grilles and the areas where sensors are housed. Road salt can leave residue that interferes with accuracy, so paying attention to small crevices is important.

Some vehicles recalibrate automatically as you drive. Others may display warnings that indicate calibration is



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needed after battery disconnections or sensor obstructions. If error messages persist, technicians can perform a professional recalibration using specialized tools. This step is especially important after body repairs or windshield replacement, as those changes can shift the alignment of key sensors.

## UPDATING GPS MAPS AND SOFTWARE

GPS systems and navigation apps tend to become outdated over time. Roads change, new intersections are added and

updated routes may not appear on older maps. Spring is a good time to install map updates so you're prepared for road trips and daily travel.

Many vehicles now offer over-the-air updates through built-in Wi-Fi or mobile connections. Others may require downloading updates onto a USB drive or visiting a dealership. Keeping maps current helps avoid unexpected detours, reduces travel time and improves the accuracy of estimated arrival times.

Beyond maps, spring is also a smart time to update your

car's infotainment or safety software. These updates can improve system performance, add new features or fix known issues.

## CHECKING BACKUP CAMERAS AND VISIBILITY FEATURES

Backup cameras are exposed to winter's harshest elements. Snow, slush and road salt can coat the camera lens, reducing visibility or causing the picture to appear blurry. A simple cleaning with a soft cloth and a bit of window cleaner is often enough to restore clarity.

If the display still seems unclear after cleaning, check for cracks or moisture inside the lens. Backup camera housing can loosen over time, especially in areas hit hard by winter potholes. Securing the housing or replacing damaged parts can restore a clean, reliable image.

Spring is also a good time to examine other visibility features such as 360-degree cameras, side-view cameras or parking assist cameras. Ensuring these systems are clean and aligned improves both convenience and safety.

# Spring Suspension Check-Up

Winter weather leaves behind more than melting snow and slushy roads.

It often creates potholes, rough patches and uneven surfaces that can take a toll on your vehicle's suspension system. As spring arrives, it's a good time to assess whether winter driving has caused wear or damage. Understanding how potholes impact suspension components and knowing the early warning signs of trouble can help keep your car safe and comfortable on the road.

## HOW POTHOLES DAMAGE YOUR SUSPENSION

Potholes form when moisture seeps into cracks in the pavement, freezes and expands. By spring, those once-small cracks may have grown into large holes. Hitting a pothole forces the suspension to absorb a sudden, sharp impact, which can strain or bend important components.

Shocks and struts are often the first parts affected. These components control how your vehicle absorbs bumps and maintains tire contact with the road. A severe pothole hit can cause them to leak, bend or lose effectiveness.

Control arm bushings, ball joints and tie rods can also suffer damage. These parts keep the wheels aligned and help maintain stable steering. When jolted by potholes, they



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can loosen or wear out prematurely. Over time, this affects the vehicle's handling and increases tire wear.

Even the springs in your suspension system can crack or shift under repeated impacts. A damaged spring may cause your vehicle to sit unevenly or sag on one side.

## WARNING SIGNS OF SHOCK OR STRUT PROBLEMS

Shocks and struts wear

down gradually, but pothole damage can speed up the process. Pay attention to how your vehicle feels as you drive. If the ride becomes noticeably rougher or bouncier, the suspension may need attention.

One common sign is excessive bouncing after hitting a bump. If the car continues to bob up and down instead of settling quickly, the shocks or struts may be worn. Nose-diving during braking or swaying

while turning are indicators of failing suspension components.

Uneven tire wear, especially on the edges, can signal that the suspension is no longer keeping the tires aligned properly. This affects handling and shortens the life of the tires themselves.

Unusual noises offer additional clues. Clunking, knocking or squeaking sounds when going over bumps often point to worn bushings, loose

components or failing ball joints.

## CHECKING BUSHINGS AND OTHER COMPONENTS

Bushings are cushions made of rubber or polyurethane that help absorb vibration and allow parts of the suspension to move smoothly. Over time they can crack, split or deteriorate, especially after encountering potholes or harsh winter road debris.

If bushings are worn, you may notice vibrations in the steering wheel or hear rattling sounds from underneath the vehicle. The car may feel less stable when turning or driving over uneven surfaces.

Inspecting bushings visually can be difficult without lifting the car, so a professional inspection is often recommended. Mechanics can check alignment, springs, ball joints and tie rods for early signs of damage.

## PROTECTING YOUR SUSPENSION THROUGH THE SEASON

A spring suspension check-up helps prevent small problems from developing into more expensive repairs. Driving carefully around potholes, avoiding deep water that may hide road damage and keeping tires properly inflated can reduce strain on suspension parts.

If you notice any changes in handling, noises or uneven tire wear, scheduling a professional inspection is a smart move.

# Understanding Cabin Air Quality

As spring arrives, many drivers notice seasonal allergies returning along with warmer weather.

While most people think about pollen in the air outside, the air inside the car can become just as troublesome.

Vehicle cabins trap dust, pollen and other particles, especially during daily commutes or long drives.

## WHY CABIN AIR QUALITY MATTERS

Air inside a vehicle circulates through a closed environment. When windows are up and the ventilation system is running, the air you breathe moves repeatedly through the cabin. If the air is filled with pollen, dust or pollution, these particles can build up quickly. This can irritate eyes, noses and lungs, especially for those who suffer from seasonal allergies or asthma.

Spring often brings heavy pollen counts, which can settle into seats, floor mats and dashboard surfaces. Your car's ventilation system can draw pollen directly from the outside into the cabin.

Without an effective filtration system, these allergens linger in the air and continue circulating.

Poor cabin air quality can also affect comfort and concentration while driving. Sneezing, watery eyes and



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congestion are distracting and can make it harder to stay focused on the road.

Over time, pollen can clog vents and reduce airflow. This forces the system to work harder and can contribute to unpleasant odors or uneven heating and cooling.

## THE ROLE OF CABIN AIR FILTERS

Most modern vehicles come equipped with a cabin air filter located behind the glove box or under the dashboard. This filter traps airborne

particles before they enter the cabin, improving the quality of the air you breathe. Standard cabin filters catch dust, debris and some pollen. Higher-grade filters, such as those made with activated carbon or HEPA-style materials, capture finer particles and help reduce odors.

Manufacturers typically recommend replacing the cabin air filter once or twice a year, but spring is an ideal time to check it.

After months of winter driving, filters may already be

holding dirt, moisture and debris. A clogged filter restricts airflow, reduces HVAC efficiency and lets more allergens pass through.

Installing a higher-quality cabin air filter can make a noticeable difference during peak allergy season.

Premium filters capture smaller particles and help improve overall air freshness. They are especially beneficial for drivers with allergies or respiratory issues and for those who frequently drive children or older passengers.

## SIMPLE WAYS TO IMPROVE AIR QUALITY

Beyond changing the filter, a few simple habits can help keep the air inside your car cleaner:

- Keep windows closed during high-pollen days.
- Vacuum seats and floor mats regularly to remove settled dust.
- Wipe down hard surfaces to reduce buildup.
- Use the recirculate setting on days with heavy pollen or pollution.
- Avoid idling behind other vehicles.