

autopaint

Washing your car – The right way.

The following steps will help you keep your car looking as good as it did the day you bought it (or better if it's recently been painted or has been neglected for a while)

What you will need:

1. Car wash soap. Don't use dish soap! Dish soap is hard on rubber components, plus it can remove your car's wax coat. We recommend Pacer Grapewash.
2. A wash mitt made of sheepskin or microfiber cloth. Both materials are designed to pick up and hold dirt. Sponges work too, but a wash mitt makes the job easier and is kinder to your car's finish. Don't use towels; they merely push the dirt around rather than pick it up.
3. Two buckets.
4. A drying cloth, Chamois (natural or synthetic) is the traditional choice, but use carefully as they can scratch your car's paint. You'll also need a few extra microfiber detail towels.
5. A shady location. (Direct sunlight will dry the car prematurely and leave spots.)
6. A dirty car.

Step 1. Clean the wheels.

If the wheels are really dirty - and they probably will be - wash them before the rest of the car. Don't wash the wheels if they are hot, as the heat will evaporate the cleaner and cause spots. You can use regular car wash soap, but a quality wheel cleaner (we use Pacer Citrus Cleaner) makes the job easier. Spray the wheels with a hose; consider wearing eye protection, as you never know what sort of gunk will get flung up. A soft brush is the best way to clean wheels, but if you are going to use a mitt or a sponge, don't use the same one you'll be using on the rest of the car! It may pick up dirt from the wheels that could scratch the paint. Use an old, dirty wash mitt or sponge. A detail brush or an old toothbrush is the easiest way to clean out small openings. Rinse thoroughly. Once you're done, take a step back -- it's amazing how much better a car looks with just clean wheels!

Step 2. Rinse the car.

Rinse down the car, starting at the roof and working your way down. Pay special attention to the area around the windshield wipers, as leaves and dirt tend to collect here. After rinsing, open up the hood and trunk and clean out any accumulated leaves and dirt. Spraying water with the hood open is not recommended, especially if you have some place to go that day; if the engine's electrical bits get wet the car may not start, plus the hose pressure can damage rubber seals that may have gotten brittle with age. The best way to clean these areas is to put on latex gloves and scrape out the dirt with your fingers.

Step 3. Two Buckets.

Why two buckets? A separate rinse bucket will remove the dirt that your wash mitt picks up. If you use a single bucket, you'll be depositing all that dirt into the soapy water, loading it back onto your wash mitt, and rubbing it all over your car!

Fill one bucket with car wash soap and water (mixed as per the instructions on the bottle) and the other bucket with clear water. Dip your wash mitt in the soapy-water bucket, wash a small section, then rinse your wash mitt in the clear-water bucket before reloading with suds.

Step 4. Scrub.

Scrub your car from the top down. Don't press too hard on the mitt -- you want to avoid grinding in dirt that could scratch the paint. As you wash, it's important to keep the car wet, especially when you get to difficult patches such as bird droppings and sap. Use your hose to mist the car as needed. Sap can be removed with gentle thumb-nail pressure, but be careful not to get over-zealous and scratch the car.

Don't ignore small cracks and crevices, as these are places where dirt loves to collect. A good quality wash mitt allows you to apply finger-tip pressure to many of these spots, but some areas may require a detail brush or a bit of improvisation. Be gentle when using a detail brush -- you don't want to scratch the paint or damage old, brittle seals.

Step 5. Quick All Over Suds Up.

After you've scrubbed down the entire car, give it a quick once-over with your sudsy wash mitt. This will help avoid water spots -- most car wash soaps have an anti-spotting agent. (Dish soap doesn't, another reason not to use it.) Remember to rinse and reload the mitt frequently and work from the top down.

Step 6. Final Rinse.

For your final rinse, remove the spray nozzle from your hose. Rinse from the top down, using a gentle stream of water to flood the surface of the car and allow the suds to cascade off. Keep the hose close to the car; extend your index finger or thumb just past the edge of the hose to avoid accidentally scratching the paint.

Step 7. Initial Drying.

It's important to dry the car quickly to avoid water spots. We used Mother's waffle-weave drying towel, which is designed to absorb ten times its weight in water. You simply spread it out on the car and drag it across the surface, and it will pick up most of the water without scratching. It's much easier than using a chamois and less likely to scratch the car.

Step 8. Detail Dry.

Use microfiber detail towels to remove any excess water. Open the trunk, hood and doors and use a microfiber towel to wipe out the doorjambs and other hidden areas; otherwise water will drip out and leave spots.

That's it, you're done! If it's been more than a year since you've waxed your car, or if the water when rinsing doesn't bead (form distinct round droplets) on the surface, it's likely time for a coat of wax.