CLEAN A RIDE

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A FREE GUIDE FROM CLEAN A RIDE

The Clean A Ride Car Care Guide

10 Habits That Keep Your Paint Looking New

Simple, plain-English care tips for everyday car owners, from your Fort Wayne mobile detailing team.



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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Proper care is a luxury worth having.

A clean car feels good. A well-cared-for car keeps looking good, year after year.

Fine scratches and dull paint often come from small habits, repeated wash after wash. The good news? Small changes help too.

We put this guide together to share the habits we rely on every day. You don't need to be a pro. You just need a few good routines and the right tools.

Each page covers one habit. You'll find a quick **Why it matters** note, simple **Do** and **Don't** tips, and plain definitions for any detailing words.



THE 10 HABITS

01 Custom-fit floor mats
02 Hand wash only
03 Proper wash technique
04 Dry it right
05 Wash out of the sun
06 Towel care
07 Dropped towel? New towel.
08 Wash towels right away
09 Two- or three-bucket method
10 Separate wheel bucket

Plus a one-page checklist you can keep in the garage.

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HABIT 01

Protect your floors with custom-fit mats

Your carpet takes a beating. Every trip, your shoes carry in dirt, water, road salt, and grit.

Custom floor mats are made for your exact vehicle. They cover the floor edge to edge and stay put, so mess lands on the mat instead of the carpet.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Custom mats protect your carpet from dirt, water, salt, and everyday wear. A proper fit leaves fewer gaps for mess to slip through.

Do

- Choose mats made for your make and model.
- Make sure each mat sits flat and stays in place.
- Shake out and rinse mats regularly, especially in salty winter months.

Don't

- Rely on one-size-fits-all mats that slide around or leave carpet exposed.
- Stack a second mat on top of another.
- Let salty slush sit on your mats for weeks.

WORDS TO KNOW

Road salt: The salt spread on winter roads. It sticks to shoes and can stain and wear down carpet.



HABIT 02

Choose a hand wash over a brush wash

Wash scratches come from friction: grit being rubbed across your paint.

Automatic washes with spinning brushes touch car after car. A careful hand wash lets you control the pressure, the soap, and how clean your mitt stays.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

A gentle hand wash is the best way to reduce the friction that causes scratches and swirl marks.

Do

- Wash by hand with a clean, soft wash mitt.
- Use plenty of soapy water so the mitt glides.
- Slow down on the dirtiest areas, like lower doors and bumpers.

Don't

- Use automatic car washes with spinning brushes.
- Scrub hard at stubborn spots.
- Reach for a household sponge or an old rag.

WORDS TO KNOW

Swirl marks: Fine, circular scratches you notice most in direct sunlight.

Wash mitt: A soft glove-style tool, often microfiber, that you wash your car with.

Microfiber: A soft cloth made of very fine fibers. It traps dirt and soaks up water instead of dragging grit across your paint.



HABIT 03

Wash the right way: top down and gentle

How you wash matters as much as what you wash with. Four simple habits make a big difference:

1. **Top down**
   Start with the roof and work your way down. The lower panels are the dirtiest, so you save them for last.

2. **Gentle pressure**
   Let the soap and mitt do the work. Glide, don't press.

3. **Plenty of lubrication**
   Use lots of soapy water. Lubrication means slickness. It helps the mitt slide instead of drag.

4. **Clean mitt**
   Rinse your mitt often so you are not carrying dirt from panel to panel.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Good technique keeps dirt moving off your car instead of being dragged across it.

Do

- Rinse the whole car first to loosen loose dirt.
- Wash one section at a time.
- Rinse your mitt after every section.

Don't

- Press down hard to “get it clean.”
- Wash the bottom first and then move back up.
- Keep using a mitt that has gone dry or gritty.



HABIT 04

Drying matters as much as washing

A great wash can be undone by a rushed dry. Use the right towels: soft, plush microfiber drying towels.

Then use a heated blower to push water out of seams and crevices: mirrors, door handles, emblems, trim, and the grille. Otherwise that hidden water drips out later and dries on your paint.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Water left behind can leave water spots and cause water etching. Thorough drying helps prevent both.

Do

- Use a large, clean microfiber drying towel.
- Glide or pat the towel gently. No scrubbing.
- Blow out mirrors, handles, emblems, and trim gaps with a heated blower.

Don't

- Let your car air-dry.
- Use bath towels or old rags on your paint.
- Skip the seams. That is where the drips come from.

WORDS TO KNOW

Water spots and water etching: Water spots are marks left behind when water dries and leaves its minerals on the paint. Etching is when those marks sink into the surface and no longer wipe away.



HABIT 05

Wash in the shade, not in bright sun

Sun heats your paint. On a hot panel, soap and water dry too fast. That means more spotting and less lubrication, so there is more friction.

Washing indoors keeps the heat down. This matters most for soft or weak paints, which are more sensitive to heat.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Cooler paint means less spotting and less friction while you wash.

Do

- Wash in a garage, in the shade, or in the cooler parts of the day.
- Touch the panel first. If it feels hot, let it cool.
- Wash and rinse smaller sections on warm days.

Don't

- Wash in bright, midday sun.
- Let soap dry on the paint.
- Assume every paint handles heat the same way.

WORDS TO KNOW

Soft paint: Some vehicles have paint that is more delicate than others. It marks more easily and is more sensitive to heat.



HABIT 06

Treat your towels like the tools they are

Your microfiber towels touch your paint, so how you wash them matters.

A detergent that is too strong, meaning its pH is too high or too low, damages towels. Use a laundry detergent made for microfiber. Skip the dryer's heat.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Soft, clean, healthy towels are gentle on your paint. Damaged towels lose their softness.

Do

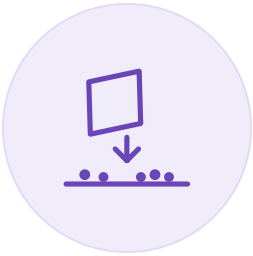
- Use a microfiber-specific laundry detergent.
- Hang dry your towels. This is the best option.
- If you use a dryer, choose the air-dry or no-heat setting.

Don't

- Use a harsh detergent with a very high or very low pH.
- Tumble dry on heat.
- Rush them through a hot dryer to finish faster.

WORDS TO KNOW

pH: A scale from 0 to 14 that shows how acidic or alkaline something is. 7 is neutral. Products far from 7 are harsher.



HABIT 07

Dropped a towel? Grab a new one.

When a towel hits the ground, it can pick up trash, dirt, sediment, or sand. You can't always see it.

Don't take the chance. Set it aside for the laundry and grab a fresh one.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Keeping every towel that touches your paint clean helps prevent scratches.

Do

- Always keep a stack of fresh towels nearby.
- Keep that stack off the ground, on a clean surface.
- Treat a dropped towel as dirty. Straight to the laundry.

Don't

- Shake it out and keep going.
- Use it “just for one more panel.”
- Take the chance.

WORDS TO KNOW

Sediment: Tiny bits of sand, grit, and mineral that settle out of dirt and water.



HABIT 08

Wash towels right after you use them

Used towels left in a pile keep soaking up whatever is on them, like paint sealant or dirty, contaminated water.

Washing and drying them soon after use helps them last longer and helps prevent cross-contamination.

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Fresh-washed towels stay softer, last longer, and don't carry old product or grime back to your car.

Do

- Toss used towels into the wash as soon as you finish.
- Wash and dry them promptly.
- Keep your paint towels separate from dirtier towels.

Don't

- Leave damp towels sitting in a bucket or your trunk.
- Let product dry into the fibers.
- Reuse a towel that is still holding old product.

WORDS TO KNOW

Paint sealant: A protective product applied to paint to add shine and help guard the finish.

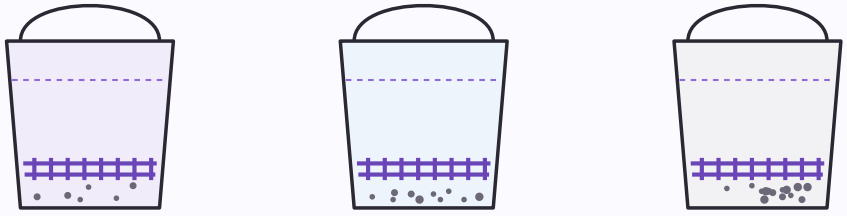
Cross-contamination: When dirt or product from one tool or surface ends up on another, like grime from one towel getting onto your paint.

HABIT 09

Use the two- or three-bucket method

Set up one bucket of soapy water (your wash bucket) and one of clean water (your rinse bucket). Put a grit guard in the bottom of each, if possible.

Wash a section, rinse the mitt in the rinse bucket, then go back to the soap. A third bucket is for your wheels (see Habit 10).



Wash bucket
Soapy water + grit guard

Rinse bucket
Clean water + grit guard

Wheel bucket
Wheels only (Habit 10)

✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Contaminants settle to the bottom and stay there, so your mitt gets properly rinsed and dirt doesn't go back on your paint.

Do

- Use a grit guard in your buckets.
- Rinse your mitt in the rinse bucket after every section.
- Swap in fresh rinse water when it gets cloudy.

Don't

- Dunk a dirty mitt straight back into the soap.
- Stir up the bottom of the bucket.
- Use one bucket for everything.

WORDS TO KNOW

Grit guard: A plastic grate that sits at the bottom of a bucket. Debris sinks below it and stays there instead of floating back up into your mitt.

HABIT 10

Give your wheels their own bucket

Wheels are the dirtiest part of your car. They collect brake dust, tar, road debris, and grease.

A separate bucket and brushes just for wheels keep that mess away from the tools that touch your paint. Rinse your wheel brushes constantly as you work.



✦ WHY IT MATTERS

Keeping wheel grime out of your paint tools helps prevent scratches and keeps your wash water cleaner.

Do

- Use a dedicated bucket and brushes for wheels only.
- Rinse your wheel brushes constantly.
- Keep wheel tools stored apart from paint tools.

Don't

- Use your paint wash mitt on the wheels.
- Dip wheel brushes into your paint wash bucket.
- Use the same brushes on your wheels and your paint.

WORDS TO KNOW

Brake dust: Tiny metal flakes and dust that come off your brakes every time you stop. They build up on wheels.

KEEP THIS ONE HANDY

Your car care checklist

Tick these off every time you wash. Small habits, repeated, add up.

- [ ] 01 Use custom-fit floor mats to protect your carpet.
- [ ] 02 Hand wash only. Skip automatic brush washes.
- [ ] 03 Wash top down, with gentle pressure, lots of soap, and a clean mitt.
- [ ] 04 Dry with microfiber towels and blow water out of seams with a heated blower.
- [ ] 05 Wash out of bright sun. Indoors is best, especially for soft paint.
- [ ] 06 Wash towels with microfiber detergent. Hang dry or use no heat.
- [ ] 07 Dropped a towel? Grab a fresh one. Keep a stack nearby.
- [ ] 08 Wash towels right after use to prevent cross-contamination.
- [ ] 09 Use the two- or three-bucket method with grit guards.
- [ ] 10 Give your wheels their own bucket and rinse wheel brushes constantly.

YOUR AT-HOME KIT

- Custom-fit floor mats
- Grit guards
- Wheel brushes
- Heated blower
- Wash bucket + rinse bucket
- Car wash soap
- Microfiber drying towels
- Microfiber laundry detergent
- Separate wheel bucket
- Soft wash mitt
- A stack of fresh towels
- A shady or indoor spot



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