



# Fall home improvement & car care

## Simple ways to extend the life of your vehicle

According to data from TrueCar.com, in 2012 the average new car cost \$30,500. That's a considerable expense, especially at a time when fuel costs remain high and cost of living continues to rise.

Because new cars have become so expensive, more and more vehicle owners are looking for ways to extend the life of their vehicles. The longer a car can stay on the road, the better an investment that vehicle becomes. Fortunately, there are several steps vehicle owners can take that should ensure their vehicles stay on the road for years to come.

\* Scale back on short trips. The toll cold starts take on a vehicle can add up over time. When a car is started, condensation builds up in the vehicle's exhaust system. On longer trips, that condensation will gradually evaporate. However, on short trips, that condensation often does not have enough time to evaporate, and over time too many short trips will lead to an accumulation of water in the muffler that can lead to rust and rust holes on the muffler. Short trips also can negatively affect gas mileage. When possible, leave your car at home on trips into town when you can just as easily walk or ride a bicycle. Over time, reducing the amount of short trips you take in your car will greatly reduce wear and tear on your vehicle and improve your fuel efficiency as well.

\* Stick to the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule. Adhering to your vehicle's maintenance schedule serves many purposes, including improving its durability and protecting various components, including its cooling system and drivetrain. While many manufacturers used to recommend changing a



Keeping a vehicle's interior clean can make it more enjoyable to drive while encouraging owners to keep their cars for longer periods of time.

vehicle's oil every 3,000 miles, many of today's newer automobiles need their oil changed less frequently. Check your owner's manual for manufacturer recommendations regarding oil changes, and don't forget to replace the oil filter when changing your vehicle's oil.

\* Pay attention to brake pads. Brake pads that are allowed to wear down can cause damage to the brakes' rotors and calipers. That damage can prove costly and make things harder on your vehicle. Keep an eye on your vehicle's brake pads, which are far less expensive to replace than rotors and calipers, and do not allow them to wear down to metal.

\* Keep your tires properly inflated. Tires that are under-inflated will negatively impact your vehicle's fuel efficiency. In addition, the tires' life expectancy is reduced considerably when tires are not properly inflated. Routinely check

your tire pressure, especially if you drive a lot, and keep tires inflated at the pressure recommended in your vehicle's owner's manual.

\* Be mindful when filling up your tank. Many people do not pay much attention to their surroundings when pulling into the filling station. But when you fill up can impact your car's life expectancy. Perhaps the worst

time to fill your tank is when the fuel tanker is in the gas station refilling the underground tanks. That's because the process of filling the underground tanks can stir up sediment that had settled at the bottom of those tanks. If that sediment finds its way into your vehicle's gas tank, it can clog filters and fuel injectors and negatively affect the vehicle's performance. So unless your car is running on empty, avoid refilling its gas tank when the tanker is still in the station.

\* Take care of your vehicle's interior, too. Caring for a car is not just about being good to what's under the hood. Caring for the car's interior will not necessarily impact its performance, but a well-kept interior will improve how you look at your vehicle and how much you enjoy driving it. The longer you enjoy driving your vehicle, the longer you are likely to keep it. Preserve the vehicle's door and window seals; clean the dashboard, including the gauges, vacuum the floor mats; and wipe down the vehicle's interior, whether it's cloth or leather. Keeping up the appearance of the car's interior will make the vehicle more enjoyable to drive and increase its value at resale.

## Budget-friendly outdoor renovation ideas

Homeowners are increasingly extending their living spaces outside the walls of their homes. Expansive and intricate stonework patios and decked-out outdoor kitchens are the kind of additions many homeowners dream of. Those with unlimited budgets can enjoy just about any look they desire, but many homeowners may not have the money to go all the way with their outdoor living spaces. But that doesn't mean it's impossible to create budget-friendly spaces that are functional, fun and eye catching.

Decks and patios are popular gathering spots outside a home, and homeowners have numerous inexpensive options at their disposal when choosing patio materials. And those who can do their own labor when installing a patio can save a substantial amount of money. Instead of higher-priced composite or resin decks, homeowners can go with standard wood, which will need to be stained periodically. Scaling back the size of the deck means less materials to buy and less labor involved.

The cost of patio blocks depends on the material and style. Poured concrete patios will cost less than placed blocks or stones because concrete is less labor-intensive. For those who desire the look of patio blocks without the cost, stamped concrete can mimic the look for less.

Homeowners may not need to replace patio furniture, even if chairs and tables have seen better days. A can of spray paint can cover up any rusted areas or spots where paint has peeled off due to exposure to the elements. Updating cushions and purchasing a coordinating umbrella can revitalize the patio's entire look. Also, very often stores run sales to clear out merchandise for new displays.

Defining edges of planting borders and refreshing the landscape may be all that is needed to improve the yard. This is easily achieved with inexpensive mulch and some vinyl edging. While cleaning up the yard, use a pressure washer to clean stains off of siding and patios and create a like-new appearance.

End-of-season sales can also be the ideal opportunity to purchase big-ticket items like a pool, a hot tub or an outdoor fireplace/fire pit. Shoppers can learn when stores discount their merchandise to make

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