



## Tire maintenance an important safety precaution



Tires are the link between a vehicle and the roadway, and tire quality has a direct impact on the performance and safety of an automobile. But tire maintenance is easy to overlook. However, ignoring tire maintenance can threaten driver and passenger safety and make a vehicle operate inefficiently.

Steering, breaking ability and traction are all governed by good tires. Worn tread can result in longer stopping times and make it difficult to brake immediately in an emergency situation. Although driving tends to be the primary culprit behind worn down tires, sometimes bald or unevenly worn out tread is indicative of a larger problem, such as a misaligned wheelbase, improperly aligned tires or tires that are underinflated. The following are some common problems associated with tires and how to address these issues should they arise.

### Blowouts

Worn tire treads increase the risk of punctures, which can lead to blowouts. Bald tires also may blowout as a result of friction on roadways that is met with minimal rubber. Getting caught on the side of the road with a tire blowout can be a hassle, so routinely check tire treads and replace tires accordingly.

### Tread depth

Average new tires on cars usually start with 10/32 inch to 11/32 inch of original tread depth. When tread reaches a depth of 2/32 inch, they are considered worn out. There are different ways to gauge tread depth. Insert a penny into the tread groove with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see all of Lincoln's head, it is time to replace the tires. Another coin test is to insert a quarter into the groove. If the tread touches

Washington's head, you have at least 4/32 inch of tread left. Don't have any currency on hand? Then look at the treadwear indicator bar molded into the tires. When these bars become flush with the adjacent ribs of the tire, the tires should be replaced.

### Alignment

According to the Rubber Manufacturers Association, improper alignment causes rapid or uneven treadwear. Tires should be aligned and balanced periodically to avoid irregular wear and having to replace tires prematurely.

### Tread pattern

Tires feature different tread patterns depending on the brand of tire. They may be directional, asymmetrical, nondirectional, and directional/asymmetrical. When purchasing replacement tires, it is advisable to match the tread pattern to

the existing tires. This helps enhance the performance of the car. In fact, some newer cars require tread to match. Mismatched treads may cause problems with transmission shifting or impact control and steadiness.

### Tire pressure

Underinflation of tires can cause failure, stress and irregular wear. Underinflated tires also may contribute to loss of control that leads to accidents. Always maintain the manufacturer's recommendations for the correct pressure, which should be adjusted based on the temperature.

Tires should undergo the same inspection and maintenance as other parts of the vehicle. Tires are a vital component to safe driving, and routine maintenance can prevent accidents and other problems.

## Strategies for proper pruning

As the leaves fall off the trees and greenery thins out for the season, exposing branches and undergrowth along the way, homeowners may be tempted to prune their trees and shrubs. But while autumn pruning may seem like a good idea, many gardening experts say it is often best for homeowners to wait until winter or early spring before pruning.

Although pruning does thin out branches and tame spent blooms, which can be eyesores, pruning also stimulates new growth. Pruning in the autumn, when plants are naturally preparing to go dormant, can weaken the plants considerably. This can compromise their chances of surviving into the next growing season.

Fall temperatures also

can be deceiving. While it may be warm during the day when the sun is shining, temperatures can quickly drop overnight. Pruning during the warmth of day, when the sap has risen in the plants, may deplete energy from the plant. When the mercury drops at night, the plant can suffer.

If you must spend time in the yard in the fall, tend to the leaves and debris that have already fallen to the ground rather than focusing energy on fall pruning. If you have been diligent during the spring and summer, your shrubs and other plants likely won't need pruning at this time of year.

Wait until winter before taking out the shears. At this point, the woody parts of many plants are dormant

and will not be harmed or primed to grow by the pruning. Chances are you won't prune too much as well, as chilly temperatures will keep you from spending too much time outdoors.

When it's time to prune, consider these other pointers.

- \* Keep tools clean and in good working order. You risk injury if your tools are dull and in poor shape overall. Spend time sharpening pruners and keep manual tools oiled and clean. Debris can lodge itself in clippers, making it more difficult to open and shut them. Wash and dry tools after use, especially when dealing with diseased plants. Otherwise you risk spreading disease to healthy plants.
- \* Cut back stems com-

pletely. It's usually a good idea to prune branches back to the main stem. Leaving a portion sticking out can catch on people or animals and produce a gathering spot for bacteria and insects. Take out thinner, smaller shoots first before moving on to any dead or dying branches.

- \* Prune dry branches. Do not prune when plants are wet. Pruning damp plants encourages the growth of microbes that can infiltrate the plant. This is not as significant a problem in the winter, when microbes have already been killed.

- \* Ask an expert. If you are unsure of how and when to prune particular plants, consult with an expert at a nursery or wherever you buy your plants.

## End-of-summer checklist

After a few months of blue skies and warm temperatures, summer revelers will soon bid adieu to the sultry days of this beloved season. Summer is often a season filled with vacations and recreation, but as the warm days dwindle and work and school commitments begin anew, there is additional work to be done in preparation for the months ahead.

- \* Stock up on pool equipment. Homeowners who have pools can take advantage of end-of-season sales to purchase a few more gallons of pool chlorine or other pool equipment. Store them after you have winterized the pool, and you will be ahead of the game in terms of supplies for next year.

- \* Plan your garden harvest. If you have a backyard garden, pick your tomatoes and other vegetables before the weather starts to get chilly. Herbs can be washed and frozen in zipper-top baggies so they can be used when cooking over the next several months. Boil tomatoes for sauce and freeze or jar them. Begin to clear out residual stems and plant debris from the garden.

- \* Clean patios and furniture. Scrub and hose down outdoor furniture, cushions and living areas. Clean and dry items before storing them for the winter, so everything is ready to go when the warm weather returns next year.

- \* Purchase spring bulbs. Buy bulbs for spring-blooming flowers and map out where they will be planted for beautiful flowers next year. Wait until temperatures start to dip before planting the bulbs, otherwise they may begin to produce shoots prematurely, zapping the bulbs of energy.

- \* Check the heating system. Although turning on the heat may be the last thing you're thinking about, it's a good idea to test it and, if necessary, have the system serviced prior to the arrival of cold weather.

- \* Tend to the deck and other repairs. Make repairs to outdoor structures now, and they'll be more likely to survive the harsh weather that's just over the horizon. Apply stain or sealant to further protect wood structures in advance of snow and ice.

- \* Examine the roof and chimney. Winter is a poor time to learn you have missing roof shingles or a leak. Furthermore, ensure the chimney and venting to the outdoors is not obstructed by abandoned animal nests.

- \* Check your closets. Go through clothing and remove any items that are damaged or no longer fit, donating them if possible. Clean out kids' closets as well, as pants that fit perfectly in May will not necessarily fit come September.

- \* Stock the shed. Once the weather has cooled down, move outdoor flower pots, hoses and lawn ornaments you no longer need into the shed or garage while ensuring items needed in fall and winter, such as rakes, snow shovels and snowblowers, are more accessible.

## RENOVATION

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room for new inventory and then use these sales as opportunities to save.

Sometimes saving means repurposing antiques or items found at garage sales. Thanks to the Internet, people can easily advertise items they no longer need or desire. A person can search for backyard items they need at a deep discount if they are fine with previously used materials. From patio furniture to masonry blocks to above-ground pools, patient homeowners can find just about any item they may need to upgrade their backyards.

Though not all homeowners can afford to create the backyard of their dreams, with a little ingenuity and some sweat hard work, homeowners can still create an outdoor oasis.

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