

Recently, a client of ours requested an article about exterior vehicle maintenance. I have avoided writing the article because I didn't know much about it. In the past I have left it up to some smart aleck teenager to remind me when it was time to wash my car with "Wash Me" scribbled into my vehicle's filth. But after recently purchasing a new vehicle, exterior care has become more important to me and I have decided to take our client's suggestion and get to know more about exterior maintenance and pass the information along. I think you will be surprised by some of my findings.

Believe it or not, many experts suggest that you wash your vehicle once a week. If you are like me, you have enough to do on a weekly basis and washing your vehicle isn't high on your priority list. Keep the pollutants and grime from eating away at your clear coat by washing your vehicle once a month. You can go to a car wash or do it yourself. Deciding which one is better for your vehicle is up to you.

According to carwash.com, professional carwashes are more environmentally friendly. They use fewer gallons than washing your vehicle at home would use and they have special drainage so that the toxins from the chemicals used during cleaning are not running off into the waste water drains. In addition, professional car washes may make more economical sense than washing your vehicle at home because the proper cleaning agents are included in the price of the wash. This includes both coin operated and drive through car washes. Plus, your time is worth something and washing your vehicle yourself can take up much more time than anticipated. If you are concerned about scratches in your clear coat, rest assured that most professional car washes have already thought this through and use materials in their brushes that are safe for your vehicle's paint job.

If you still want to wash your vehicle the old fashioned way, make sure you are using the proper cleaning agents. Dish soap is too harsh and could eat away at the clear coat on your vehicle. Invest in a quality soap and soft mitt to wash your vehicle with. By giving your vehicle a rinse with the water hose first, you can cut your washing time down by loosening up the dirt and grime. Wash gently and be sure to rinse off all of the soap. To avoid water spots, dry with a cloth meant for vehicles. Using an old towel can create tiny scratches in your paint job.

Hand waxing is recommended about once every 3 months. You can hand wax your vehicle after either method of washing. But before you start applying the wax, make sure your vehicle is completely dry. Applying wax while the vehicle is even slightly wet can make the buffing process more difficult and can even create streaks. Lightly applying and then reapplying with another light coat will create a better sheen than heavily applying one coat. Keep in mind that hand waxing a vehicle is a big job. Apply wax in 2 - 3' sections and then buff those sections out. There are many types of wax available today. Talk to your local auto parts store to see which one will work best for you.

- Casey Stump