

## Keeping it Clean

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OK, so everyone's washed a car, right? While it's not rocket science, there are a few things to keep in mind along the way to make the job easier, quicker, more effective and safer for your car's paint. Safer? What's dangerous about washing a car??? You might be surprised... :O)

Ultimately, we want to remove dirt from the car while doing as little damage as possible. Damage? What's to damage? Well... all that dirt is abrasive! We want to remove it without allowing it to scratch the surface. This is especially important on dark-colored cars that tend to show every little swirl mark. The tools we use are important too.

Before we go too far, we should talk about the "Tunnel O' Swirls", also known as the local Car Wash. A Miata with a hardtop or decent soft top can survive the automatic car wash, the question is whether to put it in there in the first place! In my opinion, we should all stay out of any automatic car wash that touches the car with anything but water and soap. That means no brushes and no "soft-cloth" washes. Brushes will obviously mark up the paint, and the "soft cloth" washes do too. How? There's just no way to guarantee that those "soft cloths" are really clean when they start whapping away at your paint.

The "touchless" washes are certainly a step up from the others, but there are concerns there too. One is the water pressure used by those systems. The other is that water spray and soap alone won't get the paint completely clean. There will always be a thin film of grime left behind by the "touchless" systems. Don't try drying the car with a towel after a "touchless" wash, you'll likely end up with a dirty towel, pushing grime across your paint! On the other hand, a "touchless" car wash is great during the winter when there's no other practical way to get the car washed. Just don't pull away thinking that the car is squeaky clean and it's ok to dry it with a towel or start waxing it.

So, what about the tools anyway? First, everything needs to be clean! Let's start with a clean bucket. Rinse it out before you fill it with soap & water. A dedicated car washing mitt is the right way to soap things up, you might even want to have a few extras around. Make sure it's clean, throw it and the towels in the laundry after your car washing session. A wash cloth for the really dirty spots and/or the wheels is a good idea. A small soft brush to reach into cracks and crevices is very handy. Soft 100% cotton or microfiber towels are the way to go for drying. A squeegee for the windows can help too. Don't forget a stiff brush for the tires. Trying keeping all your tools and supplies in a clean storage box to prevent you from starting with dirty supplies.

Let's get started then... Grab the bucket and get started, right? Well, almost. Let's wash the car out of direct sunshine. That'll help keep the water spots away. Let's rinse the car down with water first, just to flood away as much of the dirt and grime as we can. Once that's done, we can start with the wash mitt and soapy water. The cardinal rule here is to start with the *least* dirty part of the car and work our way to the *most* dirty. I usually start with the top and windows, then move to the hood, fenders, doors and trunk/bumper. Note that we don't want to wash the lower part of the fenders and doors yet, those are the dirtiest, so we'll do them last. Rinse as needed, don't let the soap dry on the car. Be sure to rinse the wash mitt after each panel or so to keep dirt out of it. Some folks use a second bucket of clean water to rinse the mitt in. Don't forget the soft brush to get the nooks and crannies around the side markers, door handles, etc.

Once all that's done, I usually do the nose. That's where the bugs are, so let's get them off now. Rinse out the wash mitt real well, we don't want those bugs going anywhere else! If you have trouble with the bugs, take a wet towel and place over the bugs for a few minutes. That should soften 'em up for you. Now let's do the dirty parts: the bottoms of the fenders, doors and behind the rear wheels. Don't use your good wash mitt on these sections, use an old one, or use a wash cloth and rinse it frequently.

Now it's time for the wheels and tires. Put the wash mitt away and use the scrub brush on the tires. Next use an old wash mitt or wash cloth on the wheels themselves. Use wheel cleaner if you must, but only on

cold wheels. Another option for hard-to-clean wheels is to wear an all-cotton "Jersey" glove on one hand and use that as your wash mitt (thanks Tom Graham!). I use a special extra-soft wheel-brush from Meguiar's, but it's the only decent one I've found and they're pretty hard to find nowadays. If you use wheel cleaner, be sure it's marked "safe for all wheels" to prevent any issues. Keep an eye on the body as you do the wheels, don't let the car dry, otherwise you'll likely be facing some water spots.

At this point, we're ready to start drying. Before breaking out the towels, try taking the nozzle off the hose and letting the water "flood" over the car. On a well-waxed car, this will literally sheet most of the water off the car. Now let's dry in the same order we washed, from least to most "dirty" area of the car. This way, if you missed a spot and get the towel dirty, you won't be putting rubbing that dirty towel very far. Be sure to turn the towel frequently. I can't say enough about using microfiber *drying* towels, they REALLY do work. Look for them in the car section of your local department store.

Gee... all this over a simple car wash, huh? Who would've thought? Anyway, this was a quick run-down of how I do it, and I'd bet each of you do it slightly differently. That's OK, the real point is to think about how to get the car clean in a careful and methodical way. Once you get your process down, it goes really quick... especially on such a small car!

So, get out there and clean that car up! Then go get it dirty again... squash a few bugs along the way. Sometimes those summer evening drives are just a squashin' bugfest! Be safe out there! Zoom, Zoom!

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