



## Boating Basics: How to Winterize Your Boat

For many boaters, annual preparation and deep cleanings are crucial for a successful spring launch. Winterizing your boat ahead of time not only adds years to the life of its motor but will make your launch that much easier. Prep *now* for smooth sailing later.

### Cleaning

It's best to start with a thorough cleaning six months early for a seamless launch. Start inside and work your way out, cleaning the cabin, heads, and saloon, then scrubbing the topsides and deck. Use a good non-skid deck cleaner to remove dirt and debris from all the crevices. Clean your canvas and apply a fresh coat of waterproofer. Clean and protect any exposed teak. Apply a good coat of wax to the topsides and any fiberglass. Clean and maintain your bright work, especially if you have exposed exterior wood. Use a quality acid based bottom or hull cleaner to remove any fouling and give it a deep clean so oxidation doesn't occur over the winter.

### Engine Room

To properly maintain your engine, follow these winterizing procedures:

- **Change the Oil.** Run the engine to warm it up, then change the oil. This will avoid any residue acids in the system and clear out any water that might freeze in the winter. Left in the crank case, the acids can corrode your motor internally causing premature wear.
- **Treat the Gas Tank.** Fill the fuel tank almost to the top, then add fuel stabilizer to prevent varnish build-up in the lines, carburetor, and fuel injectors.

When the temperature drops, the moisture condenses and results in water at the bottom of your fuel tank. This can fill your water separator and cause starting problems in the spring. Make sure the tanks are nearly full but not quite to allow for expansion in the spring when it starts to warm up. This will also avoid extra condensation.



- **Drain the Water System.** If water sits in the engine and freezes, it will expand and can crack the block, manifolds, and outdrives. To prevent damage, you must drain water from your engine. It's important to note not to run the engine without water hooked up. Most marine water pumps feature a rubber impeller which will burn out in seconds without running water.

### **For Inboard/Outboard Engines:**

Flush the engine with clean water by connecting a standard garden hose and water flushers (flush muffs) to your cooling system. Double check your intakes, easily slide the muffs over, and make sure all the holes are covered. You don't want any water escaping or air induced into your cooling system. Once the water line is hooked up, run the motor until the engine reaches normal operating temperature. This will guarantee that the stabilized (treated) fuel gets through the lines and doesn't gum up over the winter.

If you have an outboard, you'll need to change the lower unit fluid as well. Remove the vent and drain plugs, attach the lower unit fluid pump to the drain, and pump the fresh fluid through the drain until the lower unit is full. Replace the vent plug.

- **Winterize the Block with Antifreeze.** Once you've flushed and drained your engine, run antifreeze through the engine block and manifolds. Use a non-toxic antifreeze like propylene glycol which can be safely flushed or discharged overboard.
- **Lubricate with Fogging Oil.** Spray fogging oil directly into the *carburetor* so it coats the *carburetor* completely. This will allow all the seals and cylinder heads to stay lubricated through the winter and also prevent rust.

### **Cabin and Interior**

Mold and mildew are the biggest threats to interiors so it's important to promote ventilation wherever possible. Open all drawers, cabinets, lockers, and doors. Place dehumidifiers throughout the cabin to absorb any moisture. Remove all food, clothing, and cushions to prepare the cabinet for long term storage. Deep clean the carpet. Remove batteries and take them home if possible. Make sure they're fully charged and store them on wood (not concrete) as they will lose their charge and damage the plate.

### **Prepare the Exterior**

Boats that are protected from the elements will stay drier and won't develop stress cracks and gelcoat crazing from the thawing and freezing of the water on the deck. Cover your boat to keep the boat cleaner and prolong its life. For small boats, use a fitted cover to prevent dirt and debris. Poly cotton covers will breathe better than polyester covers but aren't as strong and don't wear as well. Make sure it's loose enough to promote air circulation. Add a tarp to protect the boat, choosing one that's longer and wider than the boat.

By following these general procedures and checking the owner's manual of both your boat and motor, you'll not only help protect your boat through the winter but save time before relaunching in the spring. Do the dirty work now so you can launch with ease later.

*This article is brought to you by [BoatLIFE](#), a leader in marine maintenance products and boat care. For more information, check out the [BoatLIFE winterization checklist](#).*