

“How can I make my big-ticket items last longer?”

Sales of high-priced items are dropping as more folks keep their cars, appliances and electronics longer. In fact, a new survey discovered 82% of people plan to keep their cars at least two years longer than they had originally intended! Want to extend the life of *your* most expensive investments? Try these easy moves:

1 Keep your car going!

“Car Coach” Lauren Fix reveals how to get at least five more years from your vehicle:



Choose synthetic oil!

The next time you take your car in for an oil change, ask the mechanic to use synthetic motor oil! It provides significantly better lubrication for your engine parts and contains fewer damaging contaminants than regular oil. It also doesn't thicken as much in cold weather, so it runs more freely through your engine and provides better protection all winter long. And while it costs more, synthetic oil lasts longer so you can stretch your time between changes. In fact, for many cars, synthetic oils are good for 10,000 miles—talk to your mechanic about what's right for your vehicle!

Protect your paint!

It's more important to get your car washed in January and February than at any other time of the year! Why? Because the snowiest months mean more salt on the roads that can get kicked up onto your car's paint and damage it! And while small surface abrasions might seem like no big deal, if water gets under the surface, it will become a rust spot. And once that starts growing, it can ruin an entire section of the car's body. The best protection? Visiting the car wash twice a month in the wintertime.



2 Add years to your appliances!

Appliance expert Chris Hall shares how to protect your fridge, dishwasher and range:

Wash the fridge's gasket!

Spills left behind can easily damage the rubber edging that seals the door—that's because they become sticky and pull on the gasket each time the door is opened. And if the gasket rips or tears, it'll allow warm air to get inside your refrigerator, forcing it to work harder to maintain its temperature. Luckily, cleaning up spills immediately with warm soapy water (and doing a regular monthly wipe-down) is all it takes to protect the seal—and add three years or more to your refrigerator's life!

Safeguard your dishwasher!

The first thing to wear out in a dishwasher? Usually it's the vinyl coating on the racks, which can start to peel off after about five years. Unfortunately, the steel underneath will begin to rust, and pieces can fall into the pump and break it. To the rescue: Get a bottle of vinyl touch-up (such as Plasti Dip Dishwasher ReRack, \$9 at Amazon.com) and cover any trouble spots!

Protect your oven!

After weeks of holiday cooking, most of us have filthy ovens come January! The problem? A dirty oven can lead to grease fires and even cause a short-circuit if vent holes become clogged. So now is the perfect time to run the self-clean cycle to get rid of damaging dirt.

Make your mattress last!

Keep it fresh and free of debris by vacuuming it once a month. Also smart: Flip it over every six months to even out wear and tear.

3 Extend the life of electronics!

Technology pro Jonathan Strickland reveals how to safeguard your laptop, cell phone and other gadgets:

Ditch the dust!

When dust builds up on a gadget's internal components, it can cause a short-circuit. What's more, in laptop computers, debris clogs the cooling fan and can lead to overheating. To the rescue: Wipe electronics with a soft, dry cloth and clear internal dust with a can of compressed air!



Keep 'em inside!

Sure, you probably know heat can harm electronics, but so can cold temperatures! Here's why: An icy environment makes the components of portable electronics become extremely brittle, upping the chances of them breaking. To protect them, try not to leave them in your car during the winter.

—Jennifer Leonard

Our expert panel



The “Car Coach” **Lauren Fix** (LaurenFix.com) is a former professional racecar driver and the author of *Lauren Fix's Guide to Loving Your Car*. She's appeared as an expert on *Oprah* and *Today*.



Chris M. Hall is the co-founder of RepairClinic.com, a resource for do-it-yourself consumers interested in home appliance repair. He's been an executive in the appliance repair industry for more than a decade.



Jonathan Strickland is a senior writer and blogger for the award-winning website How Stuff Works.com. He's also the co-host of the podcast “TechStuff,” which discusses the latest technology trends.

