

Spruce Up Your

Whether you want your boat to look like new for the coming season or you want to sell your boat, appearance is everything. With a few evenings and little outlay of cash, you can get your boat shipshape quickly.

First, consider your boat's hull. Most boat frames are covered with plastic resins and a top layer of gelcoat, or they're aluminum, which is sometimes painted. After years of use in even the cleanest water, gelcoat boats stain, and if left unattended, those stains become difficult to remove. Gelcoat is only a very thin layer of plastic on top of a much thicker, laid-up fiberglass resin. If you use a cleaner that is too abrasive, you'll wear right through the gelcoat and leave the base color showing, or you'll create an obvious dull spot. Even if you use a power washer, you'll still need to address some stubborn stains. You may think household detergents do a great job on boat grease and grime, but they're not good for fiberglass boats. You could use household detergents to cut grease, but they have a very high pH. If you don't rinse the detergent completely from the hull, the high pH will actually cause the detergent to etch into your boat's gelcoat.

Many good boat cleaners are available at your local marine store, and whether your boat is docked all summer long in the water or if your boat spends a lot of time on a trailer, it's just common sense to use the most environmentally safe cleaners.

Sodium bicarbonate, or baking soda, is probably one of the easiest and best all-around compounds for cleaning, polishing and deodorizing your boat. It is a mildly alkaline crystalline powder that cuts grease and dirt. It fizzes in vinegar and is effervescent in water, and it is a gentle abrasive, safe to use on almost all surfaces.

You can use baking soda by mixing a few tablespoons with just enough water to make a paste for those hard-to-clean waterlines. Furthermore, you'll be surprised how much easier big hull-cleaning jobs go when you throw a handful or so into a pail with commercial hull wash solution.

If your boat is fairly clean, mix about four tablespoons of baking soda with a quart of water to wash it. Wash as usual and rinse with clear water. For a solution that really leaves



Boat

by Alex Zidock Jr. photos by the author

your gelcoat looking like new, wash your boat with a mixture of one-half cup of white vinegar, one-half cup of household ammonia and two tablespoons of cornstarch dissolved in a gallon of warm water.

Windows

If your boat has Plexiglas or Lexan windows, do not use window cleaners made for glass that contain ammonia. Ammonia will make plastic windows cloudy. Use soap and water or commercial plastic polish. If soap and water won't clean grease from your plastic windshield, use a little kerosene on a soft cloth. For glass window cleaner that is as good as any you can buy, mix

about 45 percent rubbing alcohol with 45 percent water and 10 percent ammonia.

Bootstripe, boat name

Some boats have a bootstripe near the waterline, which is like pinstriping on a car. Bootstripes and other vinyl striping and designs can be cleaned with baking soda, but spraying on harsh household cleaning chemicals can loosen the adhesive. However, if you want to remove a vinyl name or decal from your boat, you can use a hair dryer (not near water) to heat the letters, and then lift the letters with the edge of a plastic credit card.

If the boat's name has been painted on top of the original gelcoat, spray it with oven cleaner or barbecue grill cleaner. Wait a few minutes or until the paint starts to bubble, and wipe. Make sure you then clean the area with a solution of baking soda and water, and then rinse well with clean water.

You can also remove tar from fiberglass with oven cleaner, but don't get the cleaner on any painted surfaces, and make sure you rinse thoroughly with clean water. To clean tar from painted surfaces, dip a damp rag into baking soda and then rub it on the tar. Let the baking soda remain on the tar for 10 minutes or so, and then rub and rinse with clean water.

Older fiberglass boats may look dusty from oxidation. Sometimes you can renew the look of the fiberglass by mixing about three or four tablespoons of vinegar with a gallon of water and applying it to your boat. The oxidation will return if you don't immediately wax your boat.

Aluminum

When you are cleaning the aluminum on your boat, remember that aluminum has grain just like wood. Always work with the grain to make cleaning easier and to achieve better results. You can use a damp cotton cloth with a mild household laundry detergent to clean aluminum. If you have cleats and other aluminum that's become dull or rusty, wash it first and then rub it with the shiny side of aluminum foil. If you're using a cleaner with ammonia in it, keep the cleaner away from any aluminum because the ammonia will pit the aluminum. However, if you want to paint an aluminum surface, vinegar can be used as an acid-etch preparation. Wash aluminum with white vinegar and then dry, and after the base primer dries, apply paint.



Spruce Up Your Boat

Mildew

If you wrapped your boat too tightly when you put it in storage and the cabin or lockers now smell musty and mildewy, put in some charcoal to eat up the smells. You can also place some vanilla extract on a cotton ball in the cabin to mask the odor. If you can fit any mildewed items in your clothes washer (canvas and curtains, for instance), add about one-half cup of white vinegar to the final rinse cycle to get rid of the mildew and the musty smell. Use only cold water for the wash.

If you can't remove odors from deck carpeting, try sprinkling borax on the carpet and let it sit for a few hours before vacuuming. If the carpet is wet, remove as much water from the carpet as you can and then sprinkle baking soda on it. When the carpet dries, vacuum the baking soda and the odors. Anchors, bait buckets, tackle boxes and furniture left in one spot for long periods can leave indentation marks in the carpeting. To raise the pile, try putting some ice cubes in the ridges, and when the ice begins to melt, the pile will rise. Blot these areas to remove the water.



Products for Sprucing Up Your Boat

These companies have specific marine products for cleaning and maintaining boats. Each company will answer any boat-cleaning and maintenance questions you may have.—AZ.

Bio-Kleen (800) 240-5536 • www.sledbrite.com

Boat Life (800) 382-9706 • www.boatlife.com

Iosso (888) 747-4332 • www.iosso.com

MPS Products (800) 362-9873 • www.swobbit.com

Slimy Grimy (800) 922-3097 • www.slimygrimy.com

Star Brite (800) 327-8583 • www.starbrite.com



Zippers, snaps, vinyl seats

Zippers and snaps on canvas sometimes get stuck. If you use a lubricating spray on zippers, make sure you don't get any on the canvas because it may stain. You can use lip balm or petroleum jelly, and even vegetable oil works great. Any of these products will give new life to your zippers and snaps.

Neglected vinyl seats and upholstery will become dry and crack, and using oil-based, all-purpose household cleaners on them will actually speed up the deterioration. Instead, use a paste of baking soda to clean food stains on the vinyl. Once the stain is removed, wash the area with a mild dish detergent, rinse well and then rub on a light coat of petroleum jelly.

Old crew socks and oven mittens make great washing rags and polishing cloths. Just slip them onto your hand, dip in wash water or wax and easily wipe in all of those hard-to-reach places. A sock or mitten is also great for buffing wax. And even though diapers might be hard to find these days, they're one of the best cloths to use to dry your freshly washed boat. Diapers and old, thick cotton towels were made to soak up water.

To clean a smelly bilge, pour in a few tablespoons of baking soda and let it slosh around. It won't hurt anything after it's jettisoned overboard, but your bilge will smell a lot cleaner. Don't overdo the amount; in this application, a little goes a long way.

A baking soda paste is useful for polishing chrome, cleaning (and deodorizing) your boat's head, and for removing black scuff marks from the deck. Dipping the ends of your battery cables into a cup of water mixed with a tablespoon of baking soda will instantly clean the corrosion and allow a solid contact.

Lastly, try all these cleaning tips first on inconspicuous areas to ensure that there is no adverse reaction to materials or fabrics. Never mix chlorine bleach with acids, alkalis, ammonia or other solutions that contain these items. Such mixtures can produce toxic gases and other dangerous reactions. Use cleaners and paints in well-ventilated areas. ☐