



Winterizing your Bike

There are several things you want to do to store your bike properly for the coming winter. Doing so helps avoid deterioration from disuse and also ensures that your bike will be ready to ride when it's time to take it out next spring. So find a warm, cozy place where you can make a mess with grit, grease and grime and go to it! Pour yourself a good cup of coffee 'cause you're going to be at this for a while! Put on a pair of surgical gloves; we buy a box of 100 pr at the drug store for \$16, and they last us for years. (Stuff a pair in your bike kit for roadside emergencies.)

Now is an ideal time to first inspect your chain for wear (to do this you will need a chain gauge to determine if your chain has stretched and needs replacement). Think of your chain like the oil in your car which you change in order to protect the moving parts. A stretched chain will make noise, be inefficient and most of all it will wear out the cogs on your rear gear cassette prematurely leading to greater expense. A chain gauge is relatively inexpensive compared a set of gear rings! If chain is OK, then you need to get rid of all the crap that has accumulated on it since its last cleaning. I do this task first as it's messy and it takes time, **but it is likely the most important bit of maintenance that needs to be done.** Why? The chain transmits your power from the rotating chain rings between the pedals to the rear wheel. It sets you in motion. On average, your chain consists of 100+ links of pins, plates and sleeves which all move under tension as the chain travels. It stands to reason that a dirty chain of 350+ moving parts will never allow you to transfer your full potential energy to your rear wheel and as a result you will never develop maximum efficiency. To clean, I use an inexpensive "de-greaser". (Any hardware store has de-greasers.) With toothbrush in hand, I scrub. The important thing is to get all of the crud off the chain and derailleur before you lubricate anything. Once clean, rinse away the de-greaser with fresh water. Dry everything and only when completely dry, apply your lube (oil) of choice.

How to lube? There is no point in spraying lube on your chain. A lot of it will land where you don't want it to, and you won't get it where you need it most. The best place to lube is at the pivot points where your chain and derailleur have moving parts, and the best way to do this is slowly! One drop of lube at a time! What lube to use? For "normal"

riding conditions, White Lightning is excellent. It will wash out if you get caught riding in the rain and then you will have to re-apply. There are many others. (WD-40 is a degreaser, not a lubricant!) My preference is a silicone based, non-toxic, non-flammable lube which looks and feels like Johnson's Baby Oil! I transfer this into a \$2 syringe I bought at a hobby store (used for gluing very small parts when building model planes, etc.) and then apply one drop at a time at every point on the chain or derailleur where movement will take place. No matter which lube you choose, use just a small drop at each pivot of the chain. Wipe the chain down gently, and there will be enough transfer to insure the chain is protected from rust, but not so much as to attract dirt.

Pay close attention to your front and rear derailleurs as they can become clogged with dust and oil and scrub them clean as well. Lubricate lightly with the syringe.

Fully inflate your tires, especially if you are going to store your bike resting on its wheels, as opposed to having it suspended from a ceiling. If your tires are flat, the weight of the bike sits there pressing down through the rims on one spot on the rubber all winter long. Over time, that can cause deterioration of your tire as the rubber can end up distorted and/or the tire can develop a weak spot in the sidewall. Pump 'em up!

Clean your bike. While I'm not really a fan of wet washing a bike with a water hose, because of the problems water causes when it gets down into your components and with rusting of certain metal parts, you do still want to thoroughly clean your bike before you put it away. The best way to do that is to first, take a stiff, soft-bristled brush to your bike, knocking away any chunks of dried-on mud that may be on your frame or wheels. Then, follow that up by taking a rag to your bike, wiping it down generally all over to get off any remaining dust or dirt, then proceed with a focused attack (toothbrush!) specifically on the grease and grime that may have accumulated around your drive train or other areas where lubrication can attract dirt. Finally, put an old sock on both hands and "feel and fondle" every inch of your bike: between every spoke on the rim, around the rack, handlebars, everywhere. Twist a couple of pipe cleaners around your wheel hubs and they will stay clean forever.

Second cup of coffee.

The cables that control your brakes and shifting require an inspection at this time. Are they rusted or frayed? If so, replace them. To avoid problems with rusting or poor performance in the cables, take a few minutes to lubricate the cables. Just a few drops of light lubricant in a rag that you then rub on exposed cable and very lightly work through the cable housing is what you want.

While you're wiping down your tires, check your wheels for loose or broken spokes, and spin the wheels and look to make sure that they still spin true. You want your wheels to spin straight, with no sharp veering from side to side and no rubbing against the brake pads. If your wheels don't spin straight, it's probably time to take your bike into the pros. They have the tools, jigs and know-how to fix these major problems.

At the same time, inspect your brake pads for proper alignment and to make sure you're not encountering excessive wear in the pads.

Okay, so this may seem pretty technical and daunting, and to complete it could take an hour of your time. Big deal. First time around it took me much longer and was very daunting to me. However, after getting at it or making a start, I really started to enjoy cleaning my bike and the whole process of keeping our bikes clean all season long became most important. I started to listen to how the gears shifted and how the chain ran and began to notice some subtle but important differences between an old, dirty drive train and one that was clean and freshly "lubed". Our riding became more efficient, and that was the bottom line. (Why spend good money on a good bike and let the absence of regular maintenance spoil the ride?)

The other alternative is, of course, to simply take your bike into a bike store and say, "Whatever it needs, do it." Your bike will come back to you in fine shape. Maybe. But no one will be as thorough and caring as you will be. While depriving yourself of the enjoyment of preparing your bike for winter storage and the season ahead, you will learn nothing more about your bike by letting someone else do the "work" to maintain it, and it will cost you money that you might otherwise spend on items that would make your cycling more comfortable, efficient and enjoyable.

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