

Maintenance

Keeping a boat shipshape is like keeping yourself physically fit: you have to work at it. But maintaining a boat doesn't mean slick outward appearance any more than physical fitness means getting a haircut. In maintaining a boat, as in maintaining your fitness, there are routine things you do regularly, and long-term things you do less often.

Routine maintenance, for example, might include touching up a scuffed finish with paint or varnish, scrubbing topside and underneath, restowing loose gear, pumping out bilge, and removing litter. Do any lines need whipping or replacement? Do any winches need greasing? Do sheaves and *snap shackles* need a spot of oil? Do any turnbuckles need taping to prevent sails from being torn on protruding cotter-pin ends?

Put together a handy routine maintenance kit for yourself: sponges, chamois cloth, varnish, spray applicator, touch-up paint, cleaning powder, scrub brush, small paintbrushes, light oil, patching compound, putty knife, and cloths.

If you sail in salt water, wipe the boat's *brightwork* with fresh water after every sail. This prevents buildup of salt deposits, which can pit and discolor the surface. Touch up nicks and scratches of brightwork with varnish.



Fill gouges in rails and topsides with plastic wood, marine dough, or one of the polyester or epoxy resin compounds. Sandpaper when dry, then paint or varnish.

Things that soak up water—docking and anchor lines, PFDs, cushions, canvas-covered fenders—must be dried before you stow them. Cotton and manila ropes need more drying time than rope made of nylon, Dacron, or vinyl plastics. To prevent mildew and rot, never stow anything that's not thoroughly dry.

Your sails are the source of your boat's power. Keeping them clean and in good repair is one of your highest priorities. If you sail in salt water, wash off the salt with a hose as soon as you can, and dry the sails before stowing them. If they need cleaning, spread them out on a flat wood or concrete surface, scrub them with fresh water and a good detergent, and rinse.

If you find frayed stitches, it's sail-repair time. Your sail-repair kit should include palm and needle, cotton or Dacron thread, whipping twine, sailcloth patches, and perhaps a small supply of lightweight adhesive sail patches for emergency patching.

Your boat's hull might be out of sight most of the time, but it shouldn't be out of mind. It might need cleaning or painting (if it's wood), it might have a leak, or speed-slowing marine growth might be covering the bottom.

Before painting the hull or topsides, use a good cleaning solution or compound—paint doesn't stick well to dirt. Then apply one of the modern epoxy resin or synthetic paints designed for the part you're painting—hull or topsides.

If you cannot easily haul your boat out of the water, the best way to tackle marine growth on the bottom of the boat is to don your snorkeling mask and, **with a buddy**, go overboard and rub the bottom down with a rough piece of canvas. If the growth is too heavy to handle this way, you'll have to beach the boat and scrub the bottom with a heavy-duty bristle brush. This might also be a good time to give the hull a new coat of antifouling paint. Always have a lookout person aboard the boat when you are in the water.

If your boat has a planked wooden hull, the seams between the planks could open after the boat has been out of the water for a while. The seams usually will close up again after the boat goes back in the water. If they don't, you can fill them with a commercial nonhardening seam compound and a putty knife.