

BOATING TIPS

Instead of bleach, which can discolor some materials, spray on white vinegar – acetic acid – as a way to kill onboard mildew. It works best if cut with two parts vinegar to one part water.

To reduce odors from a head's holding tank, pump it out and then fill it with a 50-50 mixture of household bleach and water. Let it stand. Then empty it again. Pump out at every opportunity.

Save money and make your own boat soap by adding a cup of powdered laundry detergent to a gallon of fresh water. The powdered soap can also be applied to a wet deck for tougher grime.

Got paint splatter on the gelcoat? Try spraying on a little oven cleaner to remove it. This tip also works to remove painted-on boat names ... so use it if you buy a used boat and want to rename it.

Add a dollop of grease to the end of a screwdriver to temporarily hold a screw onto it to get it into hard to reach places.

For those tricky oil filters that don't seem to budge from the strap wrench, try placing a piece of sandpaper between the strap and the oil filter to get a better grip while you turn the wrench.

Only use A-rated fuel hoses inside and engine compartment.

Put grommets or padding in all bulkhead holes used to run wiring.

When buying electrical wiring for your boat, look for brands labeled BC-5W2 to ensure marine quality.

In the event of an on-board fire, point the fire extinguisher's hose at the base of the fire, not the top of the flames, for the best effectiveness.

Caught off shore in a storm? Sometimes it is better to wait it out than to try and run a tricky inlet in dangerous conditions. Assess the sea state in the inlet to determine whether it's better to let the storm pass first.

If caught off-shore in a head or following sea, you can make the ride more comfortable by tacking back and forth to make quartering sea conditions.

When approaching a dock, make sure crew members know not to help unless instructed by you. Sticking arms or legs out to fend the boat could result in bruised or broken limbs.

Keep a manual bilge pump on board, along with a bucket, to help bail the boat if you have a breached hull or the bilge pump fails.

For boats with gasoline engines housed in compartments, always run the blower for 5 minutes before turning the ignition key, to clear any potential gasoline fumes.

When using an orbital buffer, make sure you move it along the boat in the same direction it rotates – typically clockwise – to prevent kickback.

The night before painting your boat's bottom, flip the can of paint upside down to get the solids into the solution.

Drilling a hole into fiberglass? Place masking tape over the area to be drilled to prevent chipping.

Apply a little lanolin oil into shackle threads to prevent seizing.

Test the smoothness of your propeller blades by gently running a cotton ball along the blade edges. If cotton catches, you should recondition the prop.

Regularly clean the contacts of navigation lights with a pencil eraser to keep them free from corrosion.

An engine's water pump impeller should be changed every three years, at a minimum, to prevent failure.

Check the zincs frequently. If a zinc has lost more than half of its size, replace it with a new anode.

After cleaning the battery terminals, coat them with a thin layer of petroleum jelly to prevent corrosion.

When towing, put a twist in trailer tie-down straps to keep the wind from rattling them and chafing your boat.

Use a socket wrench or nut driver to tighten hose clamps, because a screwdriver is more likely to slip in tight boating confines.

T-clamps provide more even holding pressure for hoses than screw clamps, spring clamps or the ubiquitous stainless-steel band clamps.

Place a reusable zippered plastic bag around a side-mounted oil filter when changing out to a new element in order to avoid spillage.

Need to premix oil into gas? Here's the magic number. For 50:1 ratio, add 2.5 ounces of oil to every gallon of gas. This is common for 2 stroke engines.

You should back up all waypoints in a chart plotter by storing them on an external memory card. Most plotters accept the same memory cards as those used in a digital camera.

When planning an offshore cruise or fishing trip, remember the rule of thirds for fuel consumption. Allot one third to get out and another third to get back and keep a third of a tank as reserve.

Cooler sliding around the deck? Lay a damp towel underneath it to hold it in place.

Adding chain to an anchor rode will increase its holding power: aim to add a length of chain equal to half the length of your boat.

Mark the anchor rode with colored tape at various depth intervals – such as red for 25 feet, green at 50 and blue at 100 – so your crew can easily tell how much scope to let out.

When stowing gear and supplies, be sure to distribute the weight evenly around the boat to affect the ride as little as possible.

When reading a nautical chart, it's helpful to know that a nautical mile is equal to approximately 1.15 statute miles of one minute of latitude.

NOAA nautical charts can be downloaded for free in PDF form at nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/pdfcharts.