
Winterizing Your Kayak

by Joanne Schwartz

Nice warm winter evening, sitting in front of the fireplace. You could be knitting a sweater, kneading bread or knotting a quilt. But, with visions of playful waves and the summer wind in your face, you decide to spend the evening with your kayak instead.

If you'd like to be nice to your kayak, now is the time to wash it down, inspect your rudder cables and attachments, deck lines and seals around both sides of your bulkheads. Make any needed repairs now, before you're ready to jump in your kayak and head off for your first spring excursion. Fiberglass repairs and gel coat patching can be done now as long as you have a fairly warm room (that's what the fireplace is for!), but make sure you have plenty of ventilation. Winter is a great time to polish a fiberglass kayak, using standard automotive rubbing and polishing compounds. At least give it a coat of non-silicon based 303 Protectant so next summer's sun doesn't fade the kayak too badly. If your kayak is polyethylene, buy a bag of disposable razors and give all the little scratches on the hull a good shave. This will reduce friction and give you a clean, faster start for spring paddling. If you're especially caring and careful, take a hair dryer-blower and go over the hull and deck slowly to smooth the micro-edges of the cuts and slices. Such a pretty boat you'll have!

Store plastic kayaks in wide, nicely padded cradles placed at the bulkheads, or lain on their side to prevent deformation of the hull. Fiberglass kayaks can be stored standing on their nose, side, to or bottom - they really don't seem to mind.

Allow your boat to dry thoroughly, especially inside the hatches. Be sure to cover the cockpit with a "drum head cover," a skirt-like covering without the body tube. Use similar coverings or even a sheet of plastic tied with a string on the hatch coverings. It's just no fun to hop into your boat next spring and find that the possums, mice, ants and other critters have made their home behind the seat! Don't leave a neoprene skirt or hatch covers stretched out for several months or they will wear much faster than normal.

And don't forget to get your kayak a special holiday present! A new deck bag, pump, tow line or deck rigging! It will return the favor many times over!

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