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How to Replace Wiper Blades

Recognise worn wiper blades, buy the correct sizes for your car first time, and replace and test them yourself in under 15 minutes.

3-day guide · 3 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Every guide on this site is produced with the Self-Directed Learning Framework: instead of an article that explains a topic at you, it turns the topic into a structure you work through — each chapter with one outcome, a starting action under twelve minutes, the minimum you actually need to know, a worked example, a checklist, and exercises using your own situation. No filler, no re-reading required.

WHAT'S INSIDE

01	Knowing When They're Done and Finding Your Sizes	Day 1 · 15 min
02	Removing the Old Blade Without Cracking the Windscreen	Day 2 · 10 min
03	Fitting and Testing the New Blade	Day 3 · 10 min

Knowing When They're Done and Finding Your Sizes

> **Outcome:** "I can tell whether my wiper blades need replacing, and I have the correct sizes and connector type written down before I buy."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Spray washer fluid on the windscreen and run the wipers for a few sweeps. Watch the glass, not the wipers: look for streaks, smears or patches they miss.

The minimum you need to know

Wiper blades are rubber, and rubber hardens and cracks with sun, frost and use. Many blade makers suggest replacing them roughly every 6 to 12 months, but the glass tells you more than the calendar. Replace them when they leave streaks or a smeared film, miss the same patch on every sweep, skip or judder across the glass, or squeak. Also check the rubber edge by lifting the arm and running a fingertip along it. Splits, a rounded edge or rubber peeling away from the frame all mean it's time. Most cars use two different lengths, a longer blade on the driver's side and a shorter one on the passenger side, and many also have a rear wiper. You can find your sizes in the owner's manual, in a parts store's lookup by make, model and year, or by measuring the old blades end to end. The other thing to check is how the blade attaches to the arm. The most common connector is a J-hook, where the end of the arm curls into a hook shape. Many replacement blades come with adapters for several connector types, but checking first saves a second trip.

Worked example

Worked example: buying the right blades first time. A driver notices a smeared arc in their line of sight every time it rains. They lift each arm and find the driver's blade rubber split near one end. Before going to the shop, they measure both old blades and get 24 inches for the driver's side and 18 inches for the passenger side, and see that the arms end in J-hooks. They check the same numbers in a parts store's online lookup for their make, model and year. Both match, so they buy a 24-inch and an 18-inch blade, both listed as J-hook compatible.

Checklist

- [ ] Windscreen checked with washer fluid for streaks, smears and missed patches
- [ ] Rubber edge inspected on each blade for splits or rounding
- [ ] Driver's and passenger's blade lengths found (manual, lookup or tape measure)
- [ ] Rear wiper checked if the car has one
- [ ] Connector type noted (J-hook or other) before buying

Exercises

1. Write your blade sizes and connector type on a note in the glovebox.
2. Measure one old blade and compare it with what the parts lookup says for your car.
3. Check the rear wiper with the same spray test as the front.

Removing the Old Blade Without Cracking the Windscreen

> **Outcome:** "I can lift the wiper arm, release the old blade and remove it, without the bare arm ever hitting the glass."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Lay a folded towel on the windscreen below one wiper, then lift that wiper arm away from the glass until it stays up on its own.

The minimum you need to know

The one real risk in this job is the bare wiper arm. It's spring-loaded, and if it snaps back onto the glass without a blade on it, it can chip or crack the windscreen. So before you remove anything, lay a folded towel on the glass under the arm, and keep a hand on the arm while the blade is off. Some cars need the wipers moved to a service position first because the arms rest under the edge of the bonnet. The owner's manual explains how for your car, often by switching the wipers on and off again right after turning the ignition off. Lift the arm until it holds itself away from the glass. On a J-hook arm, the blade is held by a small plastic clip in the middle where the hook passes through. Turn the blade so it's at a right angle to the arm, press the release tab on the clip, and slide the blade down towards the base of the arm, out of the hook. If it doesn't move, look for a second tab rather than pulling harder. Other connector types work differently, but the packaging of the new blade usually shows how its connector releases.

Worked example

Worked example: the arm that slipped. Halfway through removing the first blade, someone lets go of the arm to get a better grip on the clip. The arm snaps back down, but lands on the folded towel they had laid out, and the windscreen is untouched. After that they keep one hand under the arm the whole time the blade is off. On the second side they find the release tab, slide the blade down out of the J-hook in one smooth move, and lower the bare arm gently onto the towel.

Checklist

- [ ] Folded towel laid on the glass under the arm
- [ ] Wipers moved to a service position first, if the car needs it
- [ ] Arm lifted until it stays away from the glass
- [ ] Blade turned at a right angle to the arm and release tab pressed
- [ ] Old blade slid down and out of the hook, with one hand kept on the arm

Exercises

1. Lift and lower each arm once with the blade still on, just to feel the spring.
2. Find the release tab on your current blades before your new ones arrive.
3. Check in the manual whether your car has a wiper service position.

Fitting and Testing the New Blade

> **Outcome:** "I can fit the new blade so it clicks securely onto the arm, and test it properly before driving."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Take the new blade out of its packaging and find its connector and any adapters. Match the one that fits your arm's hook before you go near the car.

The minimum you need to know

Fitting is removal in reverse. With the bare arm held up, and the towel still on the glass, line the new blade's connector up with the hook and slide it up into the hook until it clicks. The click matters. A blade that isn't fully locked can come off at speed in heavy rain. Give it a firm tug along the arm's direction to confirm it's secure, then lower the arm gently onto the glass. Then test it: spray washer fluid and run the wipers at each speed. A new blade should clear the glass in one clean pass with no streaks. If it judders, check that it's sitting flat on the glass and clicked fully home. If it streaks straight away, the windscreen itself may be dirty or waxy, so clean the glass and the new rubber edge with washer fluid on a cloth and test again. Do the driver's side first so you always have one working wiper. Then do the passenger side, and the rear wiper if needed.

Worked example

Worked example: the blade that didn't click. A new driver's-side blade seems to be on, but during the test it chatters and leaves a band of water at the top of the sweep. Lifting the arm shows the connector only halfway into the hook. They slide it up until it clicks, tug it to confirm, and lower the arm. The next test clears the screen in one pass. The passenger blade goes on with a clear click the first time, and the whole job takes twelve minutes.

Checklist

- [ ] Matching adapter fitted to the new blade (if needed)
- [ ] Blade slid into the hook until it clicks
- [ ] Firm tug done to confirm it's locked
- [ ] Arm lowered gently onto the glass, not let go
- [ ] Tested with washer fluid at every wiper speed
- [ ] Driver's side done first, then passenger and rear

Exercises

1. Fit one blade, tug-test it, and remove and refit it once to feel the click.
2. Run the full washer test and note any streaks before calling the job done.
3. Write today's date on your glovebox note, so you know how old the blades are next time.

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