How to Clean & Maintain Foam Polishing Pads
Foam Pad Maintenance Instructions

Properly used and maintained, foam polishing pads will last for years. Improperly maintained, a foam pad can be ruined after the first usage. This Foam Pad Maintenance Kit, together with a bucket (not included) and water is everything you need to clean, maintain and preserve your foam polishing pads.

This Maintenance Kit includes:

- 12, 1 oz. packets of Snappy Clean Pad Cleaner.
- A professional Pad Spur.
- 16 oz. spray, Foam Pad Lubricant & Residue Remover.
- Instructions.

Note: We sometimes receive comments from customers about foam pads not performing properly, creating swirls in the finish or delaminating. In almost every case, we can trace the problem to improper application or poor, pad care.

Before you begin.

The biggest cause of foam pad problems and pad failures results from products being allowed to dry in the pad. These residues can become hard, crusty lumps that can scratch or haze the finish when the pad is next used and solvents in polishes and waxes can attack the glue that bonds the hook-and-loop backing material to the foam.

Before you begin polishing or waxing, fill a bucket with water and add a packet of Snappy Clean Pad Cleaner. Now you’re ready to clean dirty pads. If you wait until the pad is dirty before you start preparing your pad cleaning bucket, you’re allowing additional time for residues to dry in the pad.

Snappy Clean is a highly concentrated, citrus pad cleaner in powder form. Each packet is designed to work with 3 to 4 gallons of water. I use a 5 gallon pail and fill it about 3/4 full with water but you can just as easily use a standard 2-1/2 gallon bucket and fill it almost to the top.

Cleaning Tip: If I’m using a standard 2-1/2 gallon bucket, I still use one packet of Snappy Clean which makes a stronger solution. I do this because I typically let dirty pads soak for only 5 minutes. If you can let the pads soak for 15 minutes, you can use 1/2 packet to 2 gallons of water which will double the amount of cleanings per packet.

Using a pad lubricant.

Give fresh pads one mist of lubricant before using them for the first time. This allows the polish or wax to spread evenly and prevents a dry pad from scuffing the finish.

During polishing.

During compounding and polishing, residues will collect or “cake” on the surface of the pad, making the pad less and less effective. When this begins to happen, give the pad another mist of Pad Lubricant. This activates any dried polish in the pad allowing you to continue working.
When pads become dirty.

When the foam pad becomes thoroughly “caked” with residues, peel it off the machine and throw it in your previously prepared pad cleaning bucket. Put a fresh pad on your machine, give it one mist of Pad Lubricant and continue working.

Cleaning Tip: When I remove a dirty pad, I give it one final mist of Pad Lubricant before I throw it in the bucket of Snappy Clean. This probably isn’t necessary but I feel it helps break up the “caked” residues on the pad.

Let dirty pads soak.

I let pads soak for 5 to 15 minutes, agitate the surface of the pad with my fingers, rinse them with fresh water (a garden hose) and either squeeze out excess water or put the pad back on the polisher and give it a quick “spin dry”. I then let the pad air dry in the sun.

Caring for pads with dried residues.

It happens to all of us. You take a dirty pad off your machine, set it down and forget about it. Later, you discover a pad completely caked with dried residues.

Place the dirty pad back on your polisher and mist it with several shots of Pad Lubricant. Hold the machine with the pad facing away from you, set the polisher’s speed at the lowest setting, turn the machine on and lightly run the rotating wheels of the Pad Spur over the foam. Do this in an open area and wear a detailing apron or old clothes as the spinning pad will create splatter. You can also place the machine on the driveway with the foam pad facing up and use the Pad Spur but this will coat your shoes with splatter. The rotating wheels of the Pad Spur will break up caked residues on the pad. You can also use the rasp on the side of the Pad Spur to gently re-shape the edge or surface of the foam.

After using the Pad Spur, remove the dirty pad from your machine and let is soak in a bucket of Snappy Clean Pad Cleaner for 15 minutes. Agitate the surface of the pad with your fingers, rinse with free flowing water (a garden hose) and either squeeze out excess water or put the pad back on the polisher and give it a quick “spin dry”. I then let the pad air dry in the sun.
Compounding, polishing, glazing and finishing, what's the difference?

Compounding typically refers to defect removal. You are abrading away the top paint or clear coat layer to remove a swirl, scratch or water spot. Compounding is accomplished using an abrasive polish and a foam or wool pad with an aggressive cutting power. This abrasion may leave the surface dull. We call this dullness compounding haze.

Polishing restores surface gloss and prepares the surface for the final wax or sealant. Polishing is done after compounding to eliminate compounding haze but can be done anytime to restore surface gloss, remove existing wax or sealant coatings and visually reduce minor swirls. Many different polishes are available. Some are non-abrasive (very gentle cleaners) and some have mild abrasives (to remove fine swirls and spider-webbing). Polishing pads have a mild “cut” that offers gentle cleaning without creating surface haze.

Glazing or finessing is a step used by professionals to obtain maximum light reflection and/or liquidity. Glazes are typically polishes without any cleaning ability. They “wet” the surface with oils to maximize surface gloss and may contain fillers to hide minor defects not removed by polishing. Glazing is done after polishing but before applying the final wax or sealant. Glazing pads are softer than polishing pads having no or almost no cleaning or cutting power.

Finishing refers to applying the final wax or paint sealant. Finishing pads are the softest of all foam pads. They should almost float over the surface. They can also be used to build up multiple layers of wax or apply one sealant on top of another.

Note: Some waxes and sealants can not be applied with a circular polisher. Check the instructions on your wax or sealant bottle.

About machine polishers.

Polishing machines can be either dual-action (orbital) or circular. Dual-action polishers (like the Porter Cable 7424) trade safety for ultimate paint cutting ability. Since the pads oscillate (jiggle) rather than rotate, dual-action machines may not be able to fully remove deeper swirls, scratches and spots. That said, dual-action machines will always produce better results than could be achieved by hand and offer maximum safety for the novice user.

Circular or rotary machine polishers are designed to “cut” or abrade the top paint or clear coat finish. Care must be taken when using circular machines not to remove too much paint or “burn through the top paint layer”. Body shops and professional detailers will typically compound and polish using a circular polisher and finish using a dual-action polisher.