



The Products to Keep in Your Car for Inevitable Road Trip Messes

The odor hit me just as I was about to start my car after a hike at [South Mountain Reservation](#) in West Orange, New Jersey. Immediately I knew that I must have stepped in doggy droppings and tracked it into my car.

I had a few sheets left in a pack of [Wet Ones antibacterial hand wipes](#) that I kept in the glove compartment, but I quickly used them up. Then I improvised with water and Kleenex, but the tissues just dissolved. As I drove home with the smell still in the air, I wished I had the [Lysol wipes](#) sitting under my counter, the [PooPourri toilet spray](#) in my bathroom, and the [Sneaker LAB shoe wipes](#) I had just heard about on hand. Maybe it was time to start keeping these items in the car.

“It’s essential to have a cleaning kit, especially if you have a sudden vehicle breakdown,” Charlotte-based [Hendrick Automotive Group](#)’s Roger Mesimore says. “You don’t want to be in unpredictable surroundings without a way to clean or protect yourself from contaminants.”

Plus, for longer drives like [summer road trips](#), you never know what might happen between stops. “The majority of people probably eat or drink in the car and if a spill occurs, they will want to clean it as quickly as possible so it doesn’t cause permanent damage, like staining the carpet and seats,” adds [AAA](#) repair systems manager David Bennett.

I talked to **road trip** experts about all the essentials needed to build a car cleaning kit to prevent sticky (or stinky) situations, like mine—read on for their recommendations.

All products featured in this story are independently selected by our editors. However, when you buy something through our retail links, we may earn an affiliate commission.

Rubbing alcohol

Start with an everyday item that has multiple purposes. “You need to have a bottle of at least 70 percent isopropyl rubbing alcohol on hand,” Mesimore says. “It’s a universal cleaning supply and disinfectant that can be used on everything from hard surfaces to open skin wounds.” Found at most drugstores, **CVS Health's isopropyl alcohol** has 91 percent concentration for extra peace of mind.

Buy now: \$3, [cvs.com](https://www.cvs.com)

Hand sanitizing wipes

Moist wipes, like the easily-packable **CleanWell Botanical hand sanitizer wipes**, can also be useful in many ways, especially when traveling with kids. “Wiping up any mess is the first step, so having some sort of pre-moistened wipe would be the number one item to include,” says **Family Travel Association** founder Rainer Jenss. Bennett adds: “They are multipurpose and can also come in handy to clean off hands after changing a tire or filling the car with gas.”



Multi-surface cleaner

Whether it's a coffee stain in the cup holder or a bird dropping on the windshield, a cleaner that can tackle any interior or exterior car surface is essential. **Pur Home's** multi-surface cleaner doesn't just do the job, it also leaves behind a refreshing scent (either lavender lemon, citrus, mint, or rosemary citrus). While it can be used on any part of the vehicle, Pur Home CEO Angela Richardson suggests using a "light spritz" on windows to avoid them getting too soapy.

Buy now: \$12, pur-home.com

Cleaning cloth

Paper towels are good to have on hand for liquid spills or highly-contaminated messes, like if someone gets carsick or a child has an accident, to fully dispose of germs. While old rags are a more eco-friendly option, you never know what remnants stay on them, even after a good cleaning. Consider **Tru47's** **Stellarcleenz sanitizing silver cloth** instead. Made with 99.99 percent pure silver, it destroys germs on contact and can be used on car surfaces, smartphones, and even your body—and lasts for at least 10,000 wipes.

Buy now: \$30, tru47.com

Stain remover

"**Tide Sticks** are good for spills that get on clothes and for really big messes," Jenss suggests for road trippers of any age, but especially families. He adds: "Having a change of clothes on hand is also a good idea. Keep some extra storage bags [in your car] so that dirty clothes and the garbage created from cleaning up the mess can be neatly stowed away."

Buy now: \$3, target.com

Car trash can

Open trash cans often create more disasters. "Loose items can become projectiles during a crash or could roll under the foot of the driver and impact their ability to safely operate the vehicle, like preventing the brake pedal from being able to be depressed," Bennett says. "Ensure that you empty the container during each stop to prevent potential odors and prevent trash from overflowing." The High Road StashAway seat back organizer keeps garbage contained and has slots for all the **road-trip essentials**.

Leak-proof box

To keep all these items together, find a compact box, like the eco-friendly waterproof bento box from Certified B Corporation [Earth Hero](#). And don't tuck it away in your trunk. "The kit should be placed anywhere in the passenger compartment where it's easily accessible," Bennett says.

Buy now: \$18, [earthhero.com](#)

Padded organizer

For some cars, a flexible container might be more strategic. "Storing it on the floor of the backseat—tucked under the seat if possible—likely makes the most sense if the car [doesn't have] a particularly large glove compartment or central console," Jenss suggests. The [Osprey ultralight padded organizer](#) has foam padding, making it durable, as well as storage pockets so that contents can stay organized.

Buy now: \$25, [osprey.com](#)

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Mini vacuum

If you're especially prone to finding remnants of smushed Pirate's Booty and Cheerios in between seats and on the floor after a long road trip, a mini battery-powered vacuum, like ZOpid's compact desktop vacuum cleaner, can suck those crumbs out of your life. Use it during rest stops to clean as you go.

Buy now: \$15, [amazon.com](#)

UV light

After getting rid of any mess, give your car one last layer of sterilization. "Consider a UV light sanitizing wand, which works best on flat surfaces," [Daily Suitcase](#) travel journalist Laura Powell says. "The science is still out on how well these work on viruses, but a light swipe as an add-on to other cleaning protocols likely can't hurt." [The CleanPod UVC sterilizer](#)—which doesn't contain mercury—can zap invisible germs in 30 seconds.

Buy now: \$90, [monos.com](#)

Phone cleaning kit

During car trips, our smartphones multitask as everything from a GPS to entertainment hub (hello, Spotify!) and can easily get caught in the line of fire for messes. The compact [OtterBox mobile device care kit](#) has a solution for every possible scenario with three brushes designed for various ports, a microfiber cloth, and 70 percent alcohol cleaning wipes. And it's useful even for everyday cleanings. "Don't forget the microbes that are accumulating [on your phone](#)," Powell adds. "Clean your phone regularly."

Buy now: \$8, [otterbox.com](#)

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