How to Fix Sun Faded Car Paint

Cars & Other Vehicles · about 12 minutes · 2026-11-09

Restore chalky, oxidized paint with a machine polish and a UV sealant — and know when the clear coat is too far gone to save.

Things you will need

- pH-neutral car shampoo
- Two buckets with grit guards
- Soft microfiber wash mitt
- Clay bar or clay mitt with lubricant
- Iron remover
- Large plush microfiber drying towels
- Painter's or automotive masking tape
- Dual-action polisher
- Medium-cut foam pads (at least two)
- Soft finishing pad
- Medium-cut compound
- Fine finishing polish
- Isopropyl alcohol and spray bottle
- UV-blocking sealant or SiO2 spray
- Foam applicator pads
- Glass cleaner and trim dressing

Diagnose the Fade Before You Buy Anything

1. **Tell Oxidation Apart from a Failing Clear Coat**
   Sun damage rarely means the color is gone.
2. **Read the Paint Under Raking Light**
   Park the car so the sun hits a panel at a shallow angle, or hold a bright LED work light close to the surface.
3. **Run the Bag and Water-Bead Tests**
   Slip a thin plastic bag over your fingers and drag them across the clean, dry paint.
4. **Pick a Test Spot You Can Live With**
   Choose a 12-inch square on a lower door or rear quarter panel, away from edges, body lines, and any area that has been repainted.
5. **Set a Realistic Target Before You Buy Supplies**
   Be honest about the ceiling.

Wash and Decontaminate the Paint Properly

6. **Work in Shade on a Cool Panel**
   Move the car into shade and let the paint cool to the touch before any water or product touches it.
7. **Wash with the Two-Bucket Method and a pH-Neutral Shampoo**
   Rinse the car top-down to lift loose grit, then wash one panel at a time with a soft microfiber mitt and

a pH-neutral car shampoo.

8. **Remove Bonded Contamination with Clay and Iron Remover**
   Spray an iron remover over the panels and let it dwell until it turns purple, then rinse.
9. **Dry with Microfiber and Inspect Again**
   Dry with a large plush microfiber towel, patting and blotting rather than dragging, or use a filtered blower if you have one.
10. **Tape Off Trim, Badges, and Panel Gaps**
    Use painter's tape or dedicated automotive masking tape along rubber seals, black plastic trim, headlight edges, badges, and any panel gap.

Cut Away the Oxidized Layer

11. **Choose the Least Aggressive Pad and Compound That Works**
    Start with a medium-cut foam pad and a diminishing-abrasive compound, not the coarsest product on the shelf.
12. **Prime the Pad and Load It Evenly**
    Apply a small ring of compound around the pad face or three pea-sized dots, then press the pad against the panel at low speed to spread it before turning the tool up.
13. **Set the Polisher Speed and Let the Machine Do the Work**
    On a dual-action polisher, spread the product at speed 1 or 2, then cut at speed 4 or 5 with light-to-moderate pressure, and finish each section with a slow pass at speed 3 and almost no pressure.
14. **Work One 2-by-2-Foot Section at a Time**
    Divide each panel into manageable squares and finish one before moving on.
15. **Clean the Pad Often and Never Dry-Buff**
    Brush or blow out the pad after every section, and swap to a fresh pad when the face looks glazed or matted.
16. **Stop at the Clear Coat, Not Through It**
    Check the test area under raking light after every couple of passes.

Refine, Wipe Down, and Seal the Finish

17. **Refine with a Finishing Polish on a Soft Pad**
    Switch to a soft finishing pad and a fine finishing polish.
18. **Wipe the Panel Down with an IPA Solution**
    Mix isopropyl alcohol with distilled water — roughly one part alcohol to three or four parts water — and wipe each panel with a clean microfiber, flipping to a dry side to remove the residue.
19. **Apply a UV-Blocking Sealant, Not Just a Wax**
    Choose a synthetic sealant or SiO2 spray sealant labeled for UV protection, and apply it thin and even with a fresh applicator or microfiber.
20. **Let It Cure, Then Buff the Haze**
    Follow the product's cure time — usually a few minutes for a spray sealant, longer for a paste — then buff the residue with a clean, dry microfiber using light pressure.

21. Finish the Details That Frame the Paint

Clean glass with a dedicated glass cleaner, dress black trim with a water-based dressing, and wipe polish dust out of panel gaps with a soft brush and a vacuum.

Protect the Repair and Know When to Repaint

22. Park Smart to Slow the Next Round of Fade

Ultraviolet exposure is cumulative, so shade is maintenance.

23. Wash on a Schedule and Top Up Protection

Wash every two to four weeks with the same pH-neutral shampoo, and reapply a spray sealant every month or two, or when water stops beading.

24. Catch New Oxidation Early

Once a month, run your hand over the hood and roof after a wash and look at the paint at a low angle.

25. Know the Repaint Threshold and Get Real Quotes

If the clear coat is peeling, cracked, or has worn through in patches, polishing cannot restore it, and no sealant will hold.

Sources

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