

Lay up for winter

PBO's Ben Meakins itemises simple steps to make the laying-up process straightforward, painless and effective



With the boat out of the water some simple tasks will prepare her for the winter lay-up

While the boat's in the water

Leaks, cracks and creaks can be tricky to trace when the boat's ashore. While your boat's still in the water, take a photo or make a sketch of the affected area – or mark it with a pen – so you can subsequently identify and deal with the problem.

If the mast is staying up, check the rig. It's safer to send someone aloft when the boat's in the water – and if you find anything amiss, the yard can later take the mast down at their convenience.

While up the mast, remove masthead instruments and lights, aerials and wind indicators. They'll last longer, and you'll be able to check them for damage.

If you're going to be taking the mast down, either remove and mouse your halyards or coil them neatly at the mast foot. Oil bottlescrews and slacken them off a turn or two to make the boatyard's job easier.

Take as much as you can off the boat: it's easier to empty her alongside than it is to shimmy up and down a ladder on the hardstanding. Empty lockers, bilges and cupboards, rinse them out and leave the locker lids off to aid ventilation.

Take your sails home or to a place where they can be rinsed and dried. Think about any sail repairs now, while the sailmakers are quiet – don't leave it until next spring, when they're likely to be rushed off their feet.

Take your liferaft for servicing now to avoid the service centre's pre-season rush – that way you'll get it back in good time for next spring.

Take home cushions and soft furnishings, if you can – they'll stay drier, make the boat less damp and therefore less susceptible to mildew. If you can't take them home, prop them up so air can circulate underneath and around them.



Store boat upholstery somewhere dry – a rodent-free loft is ideal

Drain down any water heaters or calorifiers.

Top up your fuel tank to leave no room for the condensation that promotes the growth of diesel bug. Also consider a fuel additive.

Empty water tanks. You can take flexible tanks home and scrub them with a bottlebrush. If you have fixed tanks, fill them with a Milton solution and let them stand before draining.

Remove the speed transducer impeller: it could otherwise run the risk of sustaining damage from the crane stops.

Take home anything easily removable – this is particularly important for high value items like outboard engines, chart plotters and VHF radios.

Winterising the engine

It's important to winterise the engine to prevent damage from freezing. Some relatively quick and easy tasks can prevent big bills later on.

Change the oil: new oil will prevent internal corrosion and protect the engine as it sits there over winter.

When the boat's ashore you should flush through the engine's raw water cooling system, as salty water could slowly corrode it over winter. Close the inlet seacock and flush some fresh water through the engine while it is running – either

by using a hose, or pouring it in from a jug. Once you've done this, pour in some antifreeze solution and stop the engine. If the boat is ashore, check with the yard beforehand to make sure the engine's vibrations won't shake the supports loose.

If you have a closed-circuit cooling system, check the antifreeze level and top it up as necessary.

Before the big freeze

With the boat out of the water, what are the essentials to prevent frost damage when it turns cold?

If you haven't already done so, remove the boat's sails – especially furling jibs which can flog loose in high winds and cause damage to yours and other boats in a packed boatyard.

Wash, bail and dry the bilges and cockpit lockers with fresh water. If salty, they'll attract moisture from the air and never dry properly.

Make sure the scuppers are clear, so as to stop water pooling and freezing on the deck. Ensure the cockpit drains are also clear: this will be a regular task in the winter as they tend to clog up with leaves if there's a tree nearby.

Take the batteries home, if you can, to prevent them from being damaged by the cold. If this isn't possible, try to keep them trickle-charged – a small solar panel is ideal for this.

Take vulnerable items such as danbuoys and lifebuoys home, or keep them in a locker to stop them degrading.

Flush your seacocks through to remove the salt, and grease them. It's better to do this now rather than when they've seized up later in the winter. If you have traditional, Blakes-style seacocks, remove the barrels to stop them seizing up.

Make sure the boat is well ventilated down below, or has a dehumidifier and/or heater to counteract the chill.