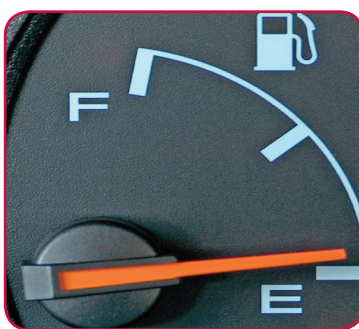


# Fuel-Saving Tips for Boaters

With rising and unpredictable fuel prices, getting the most out of every gallon is increasingly a concern among boaters. In addition to saving money, reducing fuel consumption also benefits the environment by decreasing emissions. Below are a few suggestions to help you improve fuel efficiency.

**1. Shed the pounds** – Reducing boat weight generally increases mileage. A gallon of water weighs approximately 8 pounds. Reduce water weight by keeping a dry bilge and topping off water tanks only when necessary. A gallon of gas weighs about 6 pounds. Know the fuel consumption of your boat, and maintain enough fuel in the tank to safely cover your intended trip. For example, if your boat uses 25 gallons on an average fishing trip, and your fuel tank holds 100 gallons, keeping the tank half-full will reduce the amount of weight in your boat by 300 pounds while still maintaining 25 gallons of additional fuel. Also, get in the habit of unloading non-essentials at the end of a trip, so as not to accumulate gear you do not need. A dock box can be helpful in storing equipment used only periodically.



**2. Practice balance** – Uneven weight distribution causes improper trim, reducing efficiency. Avoid becoming stern heavy. If passengers prefer to sit in the stern, move the heavier gear forward to compensate. Install trim tabs if necessary (generally a 1" trim tab span is recommended for each foot of boat).

**3. Travel the most direct route** – Straying just a few degrees off course costs additional time and fuel. Make sure your boat's compass is properly calibrated and accurate. Consider using a global positioning system (GPS), which will provide you with the most direct route and help keep you on course. However, make sure your boat is also equipped with maps and a compass. Electronics can fail, and it is wise to have this layer of security.

**4. Follow the path of least resistance** – Look for calm waters, and avoid fighting waves. Check the weather in advance. Go out when it is calm. If the wind is expected to pick up in the west, consider traveling west while it is still calm, and returning with the headwind to your back. Also, reduce wind resistance by eliminating unnecessary obstructions (e.g. take down the canopy roof whenever practical).

**5. Find the engine's sweet spot** – Throttle back. The maximum speed is rarely the most efficient. Each boat has its "sweet spot," where it should plane with minimal engine strain. Once you find that spot, avoid making adjustments. Just like a car in cruise control, a constant speed keeps a steady RPM and conserves fuel.

**6. Use "prop"er adjustments** – Choose the right propeller type and configuration for your boat. Evaluate the pitch by making sure it allows the motor to reach but not exceed its maximum RPM at full throttle. Check the propeller periodically for nicks and bends. Seemingly minor damage could severely affect fuel efficiency.

**7. Keep the hull clean** – Wash the hull often (preferably with water and elbow grease only) to remove attached vegetation and fouling organisms, which cause friction. When warm water temperature permits, anchor your boat in a shallow, calm area. Scrub attached algae from the hull using a no-scratch scouring pad or mitt. Use an appropriate antifouling paint to prevent buildup of algae, vegetation and zebra mussels. Re-apply bottom paint according to manufacturer's instructions regarding useful life of the paint.

**8. Don't "exhaust" yourself** – If the exhaust is black, white, or blue, the engine is probably not operating at peak efficiency. It is good practice to service the engine at least once a year, and to follow the recommended maintenance schedule found in the engine manual.



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**9. Consider engine alternatives** – Powerful, gas-guzzling engines are not always necessary. If possible, use a trolling motor for fishing, perhaps even an electric one. Consider purchasing a fuel-efficient engine or a boat equipped with alternative energy options, such as solar panels.

**10. Boat pool** – Boat pooling not only saves fuel, it reduces wear and tear, provides a layer of safety should something go wrong, and is a great way to connect with old friends and meet new ones. Just be sure your passengers agree on a common destination.

To gauge efficiency, record the fuel used, boating hours, and distance traveled (if possible) every time you fuel up. This will help you evaluate how changes in practices are affecting your fuel consumption and determine which are most useful.

Finally, keep in mind that even minor improvements in efficiency can add up. For example, if you have a 100 gallon fuel tank and you boost efficiency by just 5%, at \$4 / gallon that is equal to \$20 savings each time you fuel. And that is not even considering the ecosystem benefits. Just think about how nice it would be to save some cash and make a difference!

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