Boating is one of life’s best pastimes, a bonding experience for friends and family that creates lasting memories.

Some memories you may not want to keep, like the time Dad launched the boat off the trailer and it floated away, or when little Jimmy dropped the cooler with everyone’s lunch in the lake. Fortunately, there are plenty of boating hacks to make life on board easier. Here are tips and tricks, from floating coolers to boat-handling tips, to keep your memories sweet.
ONE  Want to float in the cove without bobbing around like a CSI Miami body in a straitjacket? Put your legs through the PFD’s armholes. It works like a floating chair. “Pool floats” also accomplish the same thing by keeping your arms and legs free, so you don’t have to tread water.

TWO  Crave a cold one while you’re floating near the boat? Cut a pool noodle into pieces and attach them along each edge of a big plastic container to create a cheap floating icebox. The floating Jeeves is always there with ice and drinks.

THREE  Crew full of thirsty kids? Write everyone’s name on the drinks with a Sharpie. That’ll mean fewer wasted drinks and a lot less backwash when the kids start screaming for a soda.

FOUR  If your cooler’s rolling around the cockpit in rough water, putting a towel underneath will keep it in place. A dark-colored towel can be used to also cut glare from the area in front of your helm console. It’s often just blank white space and the towel will absorb any reflective sunlight.
SIX  If you aren't sure how much time before sundown, extend your arm just below the horizon. Count the number of hand widths between the horizon and sun. Each hand width is about an hour. It's a rough estimate, so make sure you leave some extra time to get home.

FIVE  On-board stereo system gone? No problem. Put your iPhone inside a plastic cup to amplify your favorite music. It’s not Bose, but it works.

SEVEN  If you have a long trip to the lake or back home, wipe your boat’s windshield with liquid soap. That will make bugs and dirt easy to remove when you get there.
**ONE** Just add air. Masks, snorkels and fins will always serve as toys and tools. Kids love snorkeling, and if the props get fouled, you can use the snorkeling gear to cut away rope or line. When you add a Hookah diving system, the possibilities explode. The portable compressors are like scuba without the tanks. They feed fresh air into a scuba hose, so swimmers can be instant divers, both for exploring the local waters or doing longer repairs on the hull bottom. The systems aren't cheap, but if you snorkel a lot in beautiful water, it adds a new dimension to boating.

**TWO** Towing toys are a boat’s most popular hack. They range from high-end wakeboards and custom skis to toys like the Zup Board (zup.com) which is designed to get beginners wakeboarding. Inflatable towables can also make the difference between surly kids or fun, laughing darlings. An old inner tube still makes a cheap towing toy, but the best are the age and activity specific towables from companies like Air Head and Sports Stuff. Their toys range from go-slow tubes to adrenaline-pumping body suits that bounce people across the water.

**THREE** The paddle board is also a great on-board toy. They’re easy, fun and provide exercise. Many are now inflatable, so they can be stored in the ski locker and inflated when it’s time to explore that little hidden cove or tiny river where the boat can’t go.

**FOUR** The Slyde Handboard (slydehandboards.com) is a mini-board that literally fits over your hand to make body-surfing simple, without taking up much storage. The Towboggan (thewatermat.com) can tow six people behind the boat. The Seabob (seabob.com) is an advanced water sled that pulls snorkelers along the surface or, alternatively, takes scuba divers into deeper waters.

**FIVE** For Fido, there are several different boarding ladders that will make it much easier for dogs to get in and out of the water. Paws Aboard and Skamper are two brands that make different sizes for different breeds.
ONE Use a high SPF number sunscreen stick for kids, rather than an aerosol or lotion, to increase water resistance. Apply throughout the day. Lip balm with sunscreen also tends to hold longer, so it might not be a bad thing to apply it to your little ones’ lips and nose. If they get too much sun, a spray bottle filled with a 50/50 mix of apple cider vinegar and water will instantly relieve pain. Baby wipes on sunburned skin also reduce pain.

TWO For jellyfish stings, remove the tentacles by scraping the skin with a credit card. Then wash the sting for 20 seconds with vinegar and follow with hot water. Ice packs can be used to reduce swelling. Meat tenderizers can also be used as a quick remedy since the papain enzyme in the tenderizer breaks down the protein found in jellyfish venom.

THREE Water in the ears is another major bummer. The easiest way to release the water is to create a vacuum. Tilt your head sideways with the clogged ear parallel to the ground. Place your palm flat against your and press firmly for a few seconds to create a vacuum. Quickly remove your hand and pump it a few times until the water drains.
Let’s face it: Docking and trailering can be two of the most stressful experiences in any boater’s life. Here are some easy hacks to reduce the hassle and limit the gray hairs.

**ONE** Trailer jackknifed on the launch ramp and you’re getting the evil eye from everyone behind you? First of all, forget the rubbernecks and naysayers. You’ve got this. Focus. Keep your foot on the brake, and then turn the steering wheel as far as it goes in the opposite direction of the jackknife. If it’s jackknifed to the left behind the trailer, turn the wheel all the way to the right. Turn the wheel right if it’s jackknifed to the right. Release the brakes slowly and pull forward to align the tow vehicle and trailer. Once straight, back her right in and watch those smug, know-it-all expressions run off their faces.

**TWO** Backing into a slip with extra current or wind? First, put the boat in neutral and give yourself some time to see how it will impact your boat. If you find that you need to straighten your bow one way or another, keep the boat in neutral and turn the wheel before you pop it in reverse. When you put it in gear, the boat will be moving in the right direction. If you’d try the same maneuver in gear, the wind or current most likely would’ve thrown you off your intended track. So take your time and use neutral to start your turns ahead of time.

**THREE** The neutral hack also applies to a PWC when preparing for a hard turn. If you’re rounding a buoy or making a fast turn, release the throttle for a split second. That plants the bow in the water. Then hit the throttle to power through the turn. The PWC turns faster because there was more hull under the surface for the water to grab onto.

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FOUR  If you’re towing someone and speed is critical, as it often is for wakeboarding or water skiing, it’s a good idea to keep your throttle arm on the armrest. That gives you more stability and causes less fatigue for your arm to keep the throttle movements precise. Think of how a shooting bench makes it much easier to aim a rifle, taking weight off the marksman.

FIVE  Beaching is one of the best experiences of boating. It lets boaters get into isolated areas, like uninhabited islands or deserted shoals, that might be inaccessible any other way. Doing it correctly is critical. First, know the bottom surfaces as well as the tidal movements to avoid grounding. The best way is to come in slowly to knee-deep water, and spin the boat 180 degrees so the bow is facing outwards. Place the forward anchor in the deeper water, and if you have sand spikes, fasten them to both sides of the stern, so the boat is pointed in the right direction. When it’s time to leave, it’s a matter of just turning on the engine and motoring off.
ONE Besides the usual wrenches and screwdrivers, here are tools that will come in handy in a pinch: Waterproof flashlight, metal or nylon toothbrushes for cleaning gears, dental picks for tiny scraping gunk or grease in hard-to-access areas, extendable magnets for retrieving small nuts, inspection mirrors for seeing around tight corners, right-angled screwdriver, turkey baster for removing liquids from tight areas, Duct and/or Rescue tape and, of course, a multi-tool like a Gerber or Leatherman.

TWO The other necessary tool is a weather app for your phone. Not all are created equally, so make sure yours gives local updates and audible warnings for approaching storms. This tool could be the most valuable on the boat.

THREE These last two are true survivor tools, especially after a day of screaming kids. The Margaritaville cordless blender delivers serious iced drinks without requiring an on-board power source, and the Docktail Bar is a platform that holds bottles and glasses with a base that fits into a gunwale rod-holder or rocket launcher. Both are indispensable for a sunset cruise on a small boat.
ONE  Buy non-marine. Automotive discount stores may have cleaning products that work just fine. Plus, you can get tapes, greases, solvents and sealants at the local Home Depot or Lowes. Even home entertainment systems can be a cheaper install if you’re willing to install it yourself in the cabin.

TWO  Anchor overnight. Instead of stopping at a marina if you’re on a weekend cruise, throw out the hook for the night. It doesn’t get any better than boat camping under a full moon.

THREE  Airbnb your boat. Peer-to-peer companies like Boatbound and Boatsetter let you earn cash from your boat by renting it to other boaters. It may take some convincing for you to rent your baby to a complete stranger, but thousands of other boaters are offsetting operating costs on days when they wouldn’t be using their boats anyway. Why not you?
ONE Instead of packing a cooler full of ice cubes, freeze a few jugs of water. They’ll not only last much longer than cubes, but you’ll have fresh, cold water for the boat later.

TWO Use sealable bags to store items like clothes on board. They’ll make bulky items easier to store in smaller compartments, while keeping them dry. The same goes for using small Tupperware containers for cell phones and small electronics. Vacuum-sealing the first-aid kit is also a good idea to avoid water penetration.

THREE No on-board shower? No problem. Buy a five-gallon pressure sprayer with a hose and nozzle from Home Depot or Lowes, and fill it with fresh water. Choosing a dark color to absorb the sun’s heat will make the shower nice and warm when the kids need to rinse the salt and sand off at day’s end.

FOUR Having trouble gauging how much anchor chain is out? Use neon paint to mark every 10 or 25 feet (depending on the average depth of your local waters) on the chain and rope, and you’ll know exactly how much you’ve used and how much is left.
FIVE  Want to be green on board? White vinegar is safer than bleach for removing mildew and other stains on upholstery. Lemon cleans brass. If the varnish on your wood is scratched, clear nail polish will do the trick in restoring that luster. Flat cola will clean out marine heads just as well as toilet cleaner. Use oven cleaner to remove paint from gelcoat. Scratches on the windshield can be repaired with 3M-Finesse It or another fine polish.

SIX  Zippers on your plastic covers frozen? Don't try to force them open, but use what you have on board—petroleum jelly or lip balm, a splash of white vinegar or cooking spray if you have a grill, should do the trick. If the clear plastic is fogged, a headlamp restoration kit at the local automotive store should be an easy repair.

SEVEN  A Tic-Tac box works great for carrying extra hooks or flies for the anglers on board.