

RV Awning Care & Use

by Mark J. Polk

Awnings are a great feature to have on your RV. There are several different types of RV awnings and they serve different purposes. There are window and door awnings that provide shade and keep rain away from your RV windows or entry door. There are slide-out awnings that protect the slide-out roof from debris and water. And there are patio awnings that provide us with shade when we want to sit and enjoy the outdoors. The awnings on your RV will provide years of reliable trouble free operation, if you take the time to do a little preventive maintenance and cleaning.

The fabric used on awnings is made from vinyl or acrylic. Some awnings have an aluminum or vinyl wrap-around weather guard that protects the awning fabric when it's in the travel position. When you open the awning for the first time each year, or if it has been stored for a while, you will need to inspect the awning fabric for any signs of mildew or stains. Vinyl awnings will mildew. If the awning fabric is fairly clean, normal cleaning can be accomplished with a soft brush and mild soap and water. Do not use oil based or abrasive cleaners. Clean and thoroughly rinse both sides of the awning.

For more difficult stains, or mildew, there are after market commercial cleaners made just for awning fabrics. One method that seems to work well is to spray the inside and outside of the awning fabric with the appropriate cleaner, then roll it up and let it sit for several minutes. This distributes the cleaner over the entire surface of the awning fabric and allows the cleaner time to work. Open the awning and thoroughly rinse both sides of the fabric. It may be necessary to scrub stubborn stains with a brush before rinsing.

Note: Carefully follow all awning and cleaner manufacturer directions.

You can clean the awning hardware with the same cleaner you use to wash the RV. Now you can inspect the awning fabric for any tears or excessive wear. Talk to your RV dealer about what materials to use to repair or patch the awning fabric. Do not store the awning when the fabric is wet. Allow enough time for it to dry completely, on both sides, before storing the awning. While the awning is out, inspect the awning hardware. The bottom awning brackets support most of the load from the awning. Check the lag screws in the awning brackets for secure mounting. Inspect the arm pivot holes for any enlarged holes or broken rivets in the handles. Check for a warped roller tube. If the roller tube is warped it will be noticeable when you roll the awning out. Inspect the awning end caps for secure mounting and broken rivets. Make sure the awning rail is securely mounted to the side of the RV. Have any damaged or broken parts repaired before using the awning.

Caution: Never attempt to remove the awning end caps. Spring tension can result in serious injury.

In addition to cleaning and inspecting your awning there are a few things to keep in mind when using the awning. Always lower one end of the awning to allow for water runoff. The weight from water pooling on the awning fabric can cause

extensive and costly damage. Any wind gusts over 20 miles per hour can also cause extensive damage to the awning and to the RV. Never leave the awning out unattended. If everyone is leaving the campsite, store the awning in the travel position. When you go to bed, store the awning. Even when you are at the campsite, you should use awning tie downs to prevent any sudden damage caused by high wind gusts or a sudden storm. You have the option to position the awning arms straight down and stake them to the ground, but you will get better support if they're attached to the bottom awning brackets on the side of the RV. Remember, it is much easier to prevent damage to your awning than it is to repair it.

Awning Tip: Check with your RV insurance provider to make sure your RV awning is covered in the event of any damage. Some insurance companies require separate insurance coverage on the awning.

RV Patio Awning Operation

There are several different types of awnings and awning manufacturers. This is the awning operation checklist from my [Checklists for RVers E-book](#) The purpose of this checklist is to give you a basic guide to follow when opening and storing your retractable patio awning. It may not cover every item as it pertains to your awning; so only use the checks that apply to your particular awning.

- Most awnings have some type of travel locks about midway up, on both main awning arms. These locks assist in storing the awning to the side of the RV while traveling. Release these locking mechanisms.
- Behind both main awning arms, on the support arms, there will be a knob that should be hand tight. Loosen both of these knobs.
- Look up at the end of the awning roller tube on the right hand side, towards the front of the RV. You will see a small lever. This lever is what locks the roller tube to the side of the RV. Take your awning rod and with the hooked end reach up and pull the lever down to release the roller tube.
- Look up, around the middle of the roller tube, and you should see the end of the awning strap, with a loop in it. With the hook end of your awning rod reach up and hook the awning strap loop. Using the awning rod, pull the awning strap down until you can reach it with your hand. The awning roller tube should release and pull freely from both ends. Continue pulling down on the strap until the awning fabric and tube are fully extended.
- Now, the inner support arms, where you loosened the knobs, should slide freely to the top of the main arms and lock into place. Do this on both ends. When they are locked in place, starting on either end, take one hand and pull down on the main awning arm until the awning fabric is taught. With your other hand reach up and hand tighten the knob. Repeat this on the other end.
- On the side of each main arm you will notice a lever. Starting on either end of the awning, take one hand and put it on the front of the main arm and take the lever with your other hand. Raise the main arm up to the height you want the awning,

using the lever to help lift it. When you lower the lever it will lock into the closest adjusting hole on the arm where you release it. Repeat this on the other end.

Caution: Do not get your fingers or hands close to any moving or sliding parts.

Retracting your Patio Awning

- Put one hand on the front of the main awning arm and the other hand on the lever on the side of the arm. As soon as you pull out on the lever the awning arm will begin to lower. **Caution:** keep fingers and hands away from moving and sliding awning parts. Using the lever for support slowly lower the main arm until it stops. Repeat on the other end.
- Reach up and loosen the knob on one of the support arms. On the front of the main arm, towards the top, pull the release latch out that is locking the support arm in place. Holding the latch out begin to slide the support arm down the main arm. Continue to slide it all the way down until it stops. Repeat on the other end. Again watch your fingers.
- If you are retracting the awning by yourself take your awning rod in one hand and with your other hand take the awning strap and slide it all the way down the awning tube, to where the awning lock lever is located, towards the front of the RV.
- Pull down on the awning strap, applying enough pressure, until you can release the awning lock lever. **Caution:** as soon as the lever is released the awning tube will begin to retract. These tubes have springs that are wound with tension. Hold the strap securely and release the locking lever. Continue to hold the strap firmly and work it back to the middle of the awning tube by sliding it in the groove.
- When the awning strap is close to the middle of the roller tube slowly let the awning begin to retract by easing off the awning strap. Place the hook end of the awning rod into the loop of the strap and continue to retract the awning until it is in the stored position. Do not let go of the strap too early. The awning can violently hit the side of the RV causing damage to the awning and/or the RV.
- Secure the travel locks on both main arms and hand tighten both knobs on the back of the support arms.

Awning Tip: If somebody is assisting you the 3rd and 4th steps are much easier. Locate the awning strap in the middle of the awning tube. Have the person assisting you hold tension on the strap while you release the awning lock lever. Then, using the awning rod the person assisting you can slowly allow the awning to retract.

Well that about does it. With the proper care and a little preventive maintenance you and your RV awnings will have it made in the shade.

Happy Camping,
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