

## COLD WEATHER TIPS TO KEEP PETS WARM

When the seasons move from summer into fall and winter, people adjust their routines and plan for colder weather. At the same time, take a few minutes to prepare your pets for the changing seasons. The following is a list of dos and don'ts to help you give your pets the cold-weather care they deserve.

**Do** provide proper shelter:

- If you can't keep your dog indoors during winter months, provide an elevated structure with a door to protect pets from wind and weather.
- Provide dry, clean bedding materials such as straw or blankets and replace bedding if it becomes damp or wet.
- Find a house large enough for your dog to be able to stand up and turn around, but small enough to retain her body heat.

**Do** use caution around bodies of water. Keep pets away from rivers, ponds and lakes as they begin to freeze. Continue to use caution even when the water appears completely frozen.

**Do** keep hair around paw pads trimmed. Less hair will help keep paws free of ice and snow, which can quickly ball up between footpads and create uncomfortable walking conditions for pets.

**Do** check paw pads for small cuts and cracks. Consider dog boots for dogs that react negatively to walking on ice and snow - especially dogs that react to snow removal products.

**Do** clean your dog's paws after walks to remove salt and snow removal chemicals, which can be toxic to pets.

**Do** check your dog's ears, tail and feet for frostbite. Just as dogs are sensitive to hot summer sidewalks, cold winter walkways may cause pain or contribute to frostbite. A dog that continually lifts individual legs off the ground during a winter walk may feel the effects of frostbite. Frostbitten skin may appear red or gray. If you suspect frostbite, wrap your dog's feet in a blanket or towels to gradually warm them and contact your veterinarian.

**Do** provide the proper type and amount of food for the season. Dogs housed outdoors and dogs that participate in strenuous outdoor activities may require additional food during colder weather. On the other hand, indoor dogs that exercise less frequently in colder months may need less food.

**Do** provide adequate fresh, unfrozen water. If your dog lives outside, consider investing in a heated water bowl. Indoor dogs also may require more water to combat dry winter air.

**Do** keep puppies and older dogs indoors except for short periods of time. As with humans, young and old dogs are more susceptible to the effects of the cold.

**Do** pay attention to snow removal. Avoid piling snow near fences and creating an escape route for curious pets.

**Do** keep identification tags updated in the event your dog runs away.

**Do** clean up antifreeze spills immediately. Many dogs like the sweet smell and taste and, unfortunately, even very small amounts can be lethal to them. If you suspect that your dog has ingested antifreeze, take your dog to your veterinarian immediately. There may be time for Antizol-Vet, an anti-freeze antidote, to help your dog. Also consider using an animal-friendly anti-freeze.

**Don't** suddenly house an indoor dog outdoors. Dogs require a month or more (as seasons change) to become accustomed to lower winter temperatures.

**Don't** keep your dog outside in all conditions. Pay attention to the thermometer. If it dips too far below freezing, it's too cold for any dog - even those accustomed to being outside.

**Don't** treat all dogs alike. While some breeds such as Alaskan malamutes or huskies may be able to spend long periods out of doors in cold weather, other breeds such as greyhounds or Dobermans to not have the same protective fur.

**Don't** leave pets alone in cars during cold weather months. When the engine is off, a car can act as a refrigerator, holding in the cold.

## **OUTDOOR HOUSING**

**Q:***My dog lives outside most of the time. I've been told that dogs can stay warm easier than people. Is that true? Do I need to do anything special to make him comfortable in the winter?*

**A:**Although dogs do maintain a normal body temperature that's a couple of degrees higher than a human's temperature, we still have to give them some help to stay warm in cold weather.

Start with a small, cozy, insulated dog house. Bigger is not better! The house needs to be small to trap and hold your dog's body heat which will help keep him warm through the night. It should be just large enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and lie down in comfortably. The house can be homemade but new insulated plastic models available today are inexpensive and designed especially for comfort in cold weather.

Put the house in a sheltered location out of the wind. Take advantage of the sun's warmth by putting it on the east or south side of your home. Placing it on a low platform to keep it off the frozen ground will help, too. The house should have a door or heavy flap over the entrance to keep out drafts.

## **BEDDING**

**Q:***What should I use for bedding? I've heard that old blankets aren't a good idea.*

**A:**You heard right. Blankets and quilts are alright for people inside heated homes but outside, they trap moisture that can make your dog damp, chilly and uncomfortable. A better bedding is fresh clean hay or straw. They allow moisture to evaporate, retain warmth, are biodegradable and cost only a few dollars a bale. The best of these is "salt marsh" hay. All are readily available from farm supply and feed stores, stables, or local farmers. When buying straw or hay, use your nose! It should smell fresh and pleasant like dried grass clippings. Avoid any that smells strongly of mold or mildew. Spread the bedding generously in the dog house, four-to-five inches thick, and replace as needed.

## **OUTDOOR WATER DISHES**

**Q:***My dog's water dish freezes over a lot of the time. Would it help to fill his dish with hot water? Or should I just give him fresh water twice a day and not worry?*

**A:**Neither. Dogs need fresh water available to them all day especially in winter when their bodies are vulnerable to dehydration. A twice daily watering isn't enough. Metal objects conduct and lose heat quickly so switching to a heavy plastic dish will help. So will your choice of color, container size and location – dark colors absorb heat from the sun and a deeper dish will freeze less quickly than a wide, shallow one. In areas where sub-freezing temperatures are common, a more efficient solution is an electric bucket heater or birdbath de-icer.

Tips brought to you by:

**Gardner Police Department - Animal Control Division**

(913) 856-7312

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