

WINTER PET TIPS

Humans aren't the only species that can suffer from the cold, icy blasts of winter. Here are some tips to help make sure that your pet stays healthy and comfortable all winter.

Dogs and cats are attracted to antifreeze because of its sweet taste, but the ethylene glycol that antifreeze contains is deadly if ingested. Early symptoms of antifreeze poisoning include vomiting, depression, lack of coordination and weakness. If you suspect that your pet has ingested any amount of antifreeze, take it to a veterinarian immediately. To prevent accidental poisoning, store antifreeze in an inaccessible area and do not allow your pet to have access to the garage or to other areas where cars dripping antifreeze may be parked.



Keep an eye on the temperature. When it falls below 20°F, it's best to keep your pet indoors. Short-haired dogs and puppies should be kept indoors when the temperature dips below 40°F.

Beware of frostbite! Frostbite occurs most frequently on the tips of the ears, on the paw pads, and on the tail. If you think that your pet may be suffering from frostbite, consult your veterinarian right away. If your vet is not immediately available, you can start treating your pet at home. Warm frostbitten tissues by immersing the area in warm-not hot-water. When the infected areas become flushed, discontinue warming, and gently dry the area. Never rub or massage frostbitten tissues. Wrap the area with a clean, dry, non-adhering bandage. Be sure to protect you pet from further exposure to the cold, because frostbitten tissues are more susceptible than others to repeated freezing.

Check your pet's water bowl regularly to make sure it's not frozen. When your pet is outside, make sure there is plenty of fresh drinking water available. Animals can't burn calories without a fresh supply of water, and if they can't burn calories, they can't stay warm. A heated water dish is a great solution to providing fresh water to outside pets.

Consider the amount of exercise and food your dog receives during colder weather. If your dog stays indoors more, it's probably getting less exercise and may need less food. However, did you know that pets that spend large amounts of time outdoors may require up to 50% more energy just to maintain normal body temperature during winter months? These pets should be served extra portions of a high-quality pet food. You can encourage greater intake by adding some canned food to the meals.

Provide a dry, draft-free doghouse if you must keep your dog outside for any period of time. It should be large enough to allow your dog to sit and lay down comfortably but small enough to hold in its body heat. The floor should be raised a few inches off the ground and covered with cedar shavings or straw. The doghouse should be turned to face away from the wind, and the doorway should be covered with waterproof burlap or heavy plastic. You can also provide a warm, dry bed by placing a sturdy enclosed box in a sheltered area, such as a barn, garage, or porch, and by lining the box with a dry rug or towel. Be sure to check the bedding periodically to make sure that it is clean and dry. Indoor pets will also appreciate a warm bed to make them more comfortable in colder rooms and drafty floors.

Snow, ice, road salt and mud can irritate your pet's feet. Clean the paws regularly to remove mud and salt particles, and examine the pads for cuts from sharp pieces of ice. Ice-melting chemicals can irritate and burn the pads of your pet's feet and can cause serious injury if ingested. If your dog frequently lifts his paws, whines, or stops during walks, it is demonstrating that its feet are uncomfortably cold. Boots can help protect paws from cold and irritation. Be sure to get your dog used to wearing boots before the cold weather sets in.

Keep your pet's coat well groomed. Matted fur won't properly protect your pet from the cold.

More cats are injured by fan belts during cold weather months than at other times of the year. Because outdoor cats often seek warmth on or under warm car hoods, honk your horn or check under your hood before starting your car.

Paying close attention to your pets needs during temperature drops can ensure your pets' safety and comfort and help avoid many wintertime accidents – So you and your pet can enjoy Wisconsin's winters.