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Paws for Pets

Winter Pet Care Tips

Housing:

It is best to keep pets indoors during the winter months, but if this is not possible, outdoor pets must be provided with shelter. Their home should be elevated off the ground to prevent moisture accumulation and have a door of some kind to keep out winter winds, sleet, and snow. Shelters should be insulated or heated. Water sources may be heated to permit constant access to unfrozen water; thermal units designed specifically for this purpose are readily available. Outdoor pets require extra calories to keep warm. Feed your pet according to its needs when the temperature drops. In severely cold or inclement weather, no pet should be kept outside. Indoor pets should have sleeping quarters in a draft-free, warm area with their bed or mattress elevated slightly off the floor.

Roaming cats:

Roaming cats, as well as house pets and wildlife, may climb onto vehicle engines for warmth during cold weather. Be sure to check under the hood before starting your vehicle and honk the horn to startle any animals seeking shelter inside.

Frostbite and snow removal salt:

Snow and salt should be removed from your pets paws immediately. Frostbitten skin is red or gray and may slough. Apply warm, moist towels to thaw out frostbitten areas slowly until the skin appears flushed. Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible for further care. Snow removal products should be stored out of the reach of pets and small children as their toxicity varies considerably.

Toxic plants and holiday/winter products:

Plants and other items associated with the winter and holiday season can be toxic to your pets. What follows is a general guide. Please consult your veterinarian, animal poison control, and the manufacturer for specifics. Remember, the earlier you seek treatment, the better for your pet!

Low toxicity -- poinsettia leaves/stems; balsam/pine/cedar/fir; angel hair (spun glass); Christmas tree preservatives; snow sprays/snow flock; tree ornaments; super glue; styrofoam; icicles (tinsel); and crayons/paints.

Moderate toxicity -- fireplace colors/salts; plastic model cement Moderate to high toxicity holly berries and leaves; bubbling lights (methylene chloride); snow scenes (may contain salmonella);

A Feature by...



Gail C. Golab, DVM, PhD

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aftershave/perfumes/alcoholic beverages; and chocolate (dark is more toxic than milk).

Highly toxic -- mistletoe (especially berries); epoxy adhesives; and antifreeze. Please note that some items have special problems. For example, whereas angel hair is usually considered to be of low toxicity, it can irritate eyes, skin, and the gastrointestinal tract; the content of Christmas tree preservatives varies and often effects depend upon the amount ingested; styrofoam, small parts from Christmas tree ornaments and toys, as well as tinsel, can cause mechanical obstructions in the gastrointestinal tract; snow flock can cause problems if sprayed into the mouth and inhaled; and chocolate, of any type, should never be given to a pet. Antifreeze deserves special mention because even a very small amount can be rapidly fatal to pets.

Other holiday concerns:

If you plan to take your pet with you during holiday visits, make sure that your pet is welcome first (with all the activity, it may be better to board your pet or hire a pet sitter). Holiday treats, such as rich, fatty food scraps, bones from fish, pork, and poultry, alcoholic beverages, and chocolate, can be harmful or toxic to pets. Do not allow friends and relatives to give your pet special treats it could ruin everyone's holiday (including your veterinarian's). Do not allow pets to play with ribbons, yarn, or six-pack beverage holders and don't put ribbons or yarn around your pet's neck. If you want to decorate your pet, invest in a holiday collar. These last for many years, are more attractive, and are a lot safer! Cover or tack down electrical cords.

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