



Our Best Friends: cold weather tips

Description

The importance of protecting your pets in winter

By **Vanessa Rose**

*This is the first of a new series of articles on pet care called **Our Best Friends**, written by **Vanessa Rose**, founder and owner of [Les Anges Gardiennes](#) pet care services. Vanessa trained as a Veterinary Technician and has over 16 years of experience in providing professional pet care.*

Wintertime can present a number of challenges to pet owners, in addition to raising many concerns. Just a few minutes of exposure outdoors in extreme cold could result in frostbite or even hypothermia. While there are always preventative measures we humans can take for ourselves, such as bundling up or just staying indoors, our pets rely on us to make sure they are safe and warm. The following is a list of tips to help you protect your animals during the cold weather.

Know your dog's limit

A simple solution and a well established precaution is to just shorten your walks outside. After all, your dog shouldn't be out longer than you can bear to be. While this is a good mindset to have, it's also very important that you know your dog's limits. After all, a Chihuahua is going to fare much differently than a Husky in extreme weather conditions.

It is of utmost importance that you ensure your dog's fur is completely dry before it is allowed to go outside. Dry fur provides better insulation than wet. An additional measure you can take is investing in a winter coat or sweater for your dog, especially if it does not have thick fur that is biologically meant to keep it warm in the winter (such as with Siberian Huskies).



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However, it is also important to not overestimate your dog's tolerance for the cold just because it has thick fur. In extreme cold weather, it is safest for all dogs to have their walks shortened.

If your pet does happen to have long fur and a greater tolerance for the cold, a walk down the block could be beneficial. However, if your dog has very short fur and a low cold tolerance, it is always best to do a quick in-and-out.

Take your dog out, but then extend playtime indoors so that it gets the exercise it needs without both of you risking your health to put in the steps.

Never leave your pets alone in a car

Just as you should never leave your pet in the car in hot weather, the same applies to the cold. In low temperatures, that vehicle can very quickly turn into a freezer.

When driving with your pet, keep the heat on until you reach your destination. Make sure to park as close as you can to your destination, to get from your car to a warm interior as quickly as possible.

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Honk or bang the hood before starting your car

Why should you do this? Because in the winter, especially on very cold days, stray cats are drawn to vehicles for warmth and may be seriously injured or even killed by the fan belt. Even if you think the possibility of a cat finding shelter in your car is limited, please honk or bang the hood. It is better to be safe than sorry.

Wipe your dog's paws

This may seem like a pretty standard thing to do after returning from a walk outside. After all, you don't want your pup tracking slush and snow all over your floor. However, the reason veterinarians advise this is so much more important.

Wiping your dog's paws helps remove any traces of antifreeze that they may have come into contact with. Antifreeze is extremely toxic if ingested, and the first thing your pup will do to warm up its paws is to lick them.

Salt and gravel can cause stomach problems if ingested due to a compound called potassium chloride. This will greatly irritate your dog's stomach and is dangerous when consumed in large amounts.

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An additional precaution to take is protecting your dog's paws with booties. These will prevent its paws from coming into contact with any of the dangerous compounds as well as keep them warm and dry.

It's advisable to invest in some clean wipes from a pet store for your dog's paws. This ensures that any trace of antifreeze, salt or gravel is thoroughly removed.

You should always use products that are targeted specifically for dogs. Baby wipes or wet wipes are not created with the intention of being used on a dog that will likely lick the solution. When you pick out clean wipes for your dog, choose those that are both fragrance and chemical-free to avoid any potential irritation.

An alternative method is to take a small amount of gentle dog shampoo, rub it into a moist cloth and use this to clean your dog's paws. Avoid using excess shampoo, as this will leave behind residue. If this does happen, use a cloth that has been soaked in water to remove it.

Keeping your felines warm

In cold weather, the only option to protect your cats is to keep them indoors. Your cat will naturally gravitate towards its preferred warm spot. If you have a Sphynx (a hairless cat), it is beneficial for it to have a sweater for the winter as it needs to work harder to regulate its body temperature.

An additional tip, that is both helpful and fun, is to make a small shelter out of blankets for your cat. This will provide more insulation as well as comfort and it can be a simple thing to do the night before you have to leave for work or school. If you have kids, it could also be a fun activity for them to build a little blanket fort for their feline companion.

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Protecting feral cats

It's important to make sure that no animals are hiding under the hood of your car for warmth. But this is not the only precaution that you can take to save lives this winter. You can build a winter shelter.

The best option for the shelter is a Styrofoam bin, or a Rubbermaid™ plastic storage bin (this brand is more flexible). Raise the bin a few inches off of the ground using 2x4's to ensure that the base isn't touching the cold ground. When cutting the opening for the shelter, make sure that it is a few inches above the base to prevent any water from leaking in. Make the entrance out to be around 6-inches in diameter. This is large enough for a cat to get in, but the small entrance also provides greater insulation.

For the interior, you should only use materials that cats can comfortably burrow into. Straw is the best insulating material. It can absorb more moisture and is less prone to mould. Blankets and towels are poor insulators because they retain moisture, making the cat colder.

Do not put water inside of the shelter. It can spill easily and ruin the interior of the shelter.

Check out this step-by-step video on how to build a shelter.

If you wish to share your own tips on how to keep your pets safe and warm in cold weather you are welcome to



leave a comment below.

Stay safe, stay warm and most importantly,
keep those tails wagging!

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Vanessa Rose is the founder and owner of [Les Anges Gardiennes](#) pet care which offers a variety of services “to keep your pets safe, comfortable and loved”.



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