



Keeping Your Pets Safe – Indoors and Outdoors

All pet owners know this for a fact – dogs and cats can be active and curious companions! They enjoy investigating new objects, tasting new foods, and exploring new places. In addition, many pets enjoy spending time outdoors, in all types of weather. Understanding our dog and cats’ natural behaviors and following a few pet safety guidelines help ensure that our pets are both happy and protected.

HOME SAFETY

It is one of those “laws of nature” that the things that are the most attractive to pets are often the very things that are potentially hazardous! A good rule of thumb is to approach pet-proofing your home in the same manner that you would child-proof your house for a toddler:

- ✓ **Electrical cords:** Remove or secure any exposed electrical cords. This is especially important when you bring a new puppy or kitten into your home. Remember that all puppies (and many young adult dogs) chew items that are novel, regardless of whether they are tasty or not. And, for reasons that are not fully understood, some cats enjoy chewing on odd assortments of items, including electrical cords.
- ✓ **Household appliances and cleaning supplies:** Keep the doors of clothes washers, clothes dryers and dishwashers closed when not in use. Curious cats may crawl into small dark spaces to explore or nap. Place household cleaning materials and medicine bottles in a secure and inaccessible place. If you have an especially curious pet, install child-proof latches to secure cabinets and drawers as an added precaution.

- ✓ **Wastebaskets:** Kitchen garbage is a strong temptation for many pets because of all the enticing aromas and paper products inside. Unfortunately, ingesting spoiled food and other kitchen waste is a common cause of gastrointestinal illness in pets, especially young dogs. Garbage stealing can be easily prevented by using a receptacle with a self-closing lid or placing the can in an inaccessible place.

- ✓ **Plants:** Do not grow house plants that are potentially toxic to animals. Common examples include caladium, castor bean, dumbcane, elephant’s ear, lantana, mistletoe, philodendrons, lilies, sago palm, poinsettia, and pothos. If you are uncertain about the safety of a plant, consult your veterinarian or contact the ASPCA’s Animal Poison Control Center for a complete list of toxic plants (<http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control/>).

- ✓ **Exterior doors and windows:** All dogs and some cats love to go outdoors, and quickly learn that certain doors in the house signify an opportunity for a walk or a romp in the yard. Some pets even become masters at learning to open screen door or window latches. Windows are a special concern for cats because many enjoy resting in window sills and may lean against the screens of open windows. Teach your dog to “wait” at all doors before going in or out and keep doors and window screens securely fastened to ensure that your pet does not escape or accidentally fall.





OUTDOOR SAFETY

Most pets love to be outdoors! Walks in the neighborhood, hikes in a park or just playing in the backyard are some of the fun outdoor activities that owners engage in with their pets. Here are a few tips for ensuring your dog or cat's safety when outside in your yard or with you on a walk.

- ✓ **Gates and fencing:** If you have a fenced yard, make sure that it is secure. Your dog should be unable to jump over, dig under, or squeeze through any part of the fence. Gates should be hinged to close and latch automatically when you enter or leave the yard to ensure that they are not unintentionally left open. An option for cats that enjoy time outdoors can be to provide a covered outdoor cat enclosure on your deck or in the yard.
- ✓ **Leash supervision:** Never allow your dog or cat to run loose in your neighborhood. Pets who roam freely may become injured or killed by a car, stolen, lost, or attacked by other animals. They may also contract infectious diseases or ingest toxic pesticides, rodenticides, or antifreeze. When you are out walking or in an unfenced yard, keep your dog on-lead (or under voice control if he is well trained). If your cat enjoys going walking with you, train him to accept a harness and to walk on lead. Keeping pets leashed ensures their safety and makes certain that your neighbors do not have unwanted visits from your pet. A final precaution: never tie pets outside, unsupervised. This leaves them completely vulnerable to other animals or people and is not safe.
- ✓ **Outdoor plants:** Some outdoor plants are toxic to animals. Plants to keep your dog and cat away from include potato (all green parts), morning glory, foxglove, sago palm, lily of the valley, and certain bulbs, such as daffodils. Avoid using cocoa bean mulch in your garden; many dogs are attracted to it and the ingestion of large amounts is toxic.
- ✓ **Garage:** If your pet has access to your garage or garden shed, keep all pesticides, rodenticides, paints, thinners, and garden chemicals safely sealed and placed on high shelves. This is especially important for anti-freeze, which is very attractive to animals because of its sweet odor and taste, yet is extremely toxic when consumed. If you suspect anti-freeze poisoning in your pet, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ✓ **Hot weather:** Dogs and cats do not sweat through their skin, but rather rid themselves of excess body heat through panting. However, this is a relatively inefficient cooling mechanism; as a result dogs and cats are very sensitive to hot weather and susceptible to heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Pets at added risk of overheating include seniors, puppies and kittens, working dogs, and brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds such as Pugs, Bulldogs and Pekinese dogs, and Persian cats. Always keep your pets indoors during the hottest part of summer days. When animals are outdoors, make sure that grassy areas of shade and plenty of water are always available to them. Some dogs enjoy staying cool with a play pool or water sprinkler. Finally, although some owners believe that shaving a pet's long coat helps with cooling, this is not recommended because pets' coats actually insulate them from excess heat as well as from the cold.
- ✓ **Cold weather:** Cold weather also brings special concerns for pets. Similar to hot weather, the ideal place for pets during cold days is indoors. When pets spend time outdoors in cold weather, be aware of the surfaces that you walk on. If you take your pet outside in snowy or icy weather, be sure to check paws for irritation or ice balls. After walking on pavement treated with salt or chemical snow removers, wipe your pet's paws with a damp cloth. Some small dogs who have short coats benefit from a coat to keep them warm during winter walks.
- ✓ **Car travel:** Many dogs (and some cats!) enjoy running errands in the car with their owners. This is a great activity, provided the weather is neither too hot nor too cold. During warm days, even when car windows are left partially open, the interior of a car will rapidly reach over 120° F in less than 30 minutes. This occurs even when outdoor temperatures are much lower because cars behave like a greenhouse, trapping the sun's heat. When outdoor temperatures are above 70°F, play it safe and leave your pet at home. Similarly, avoid leaving your dog or cat in the car during cold and windy weather, when the car's interior temperature may quickly become too cold for your pet to be comfortable.

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