

By Dr. Maria Krenz, DVM – The Zimmerman Veterinary Clinic 763-856-4848

Winter Tips for Happy Pets

As the weather gets colder, it is time to start winterizing your pets. Winters can be very harsh in Minnesota. However, with a few extra precautions many pets can be happy and healthy, even through the coldest of winters.

Provide fresh water.

Fresh, accessible water is as important in the winter as it is in the summer. Outdoor pets should be provided ice-free water. There are many heated water bowls available for those outdoor pets. In the winter, water can freeze quickly, within minutes. A heated water bowl provides safe, constant access to water. Now is the time to purchase these products, as they can be very difficult to find in January.

Provide shelter.

Outdoor pets can survive the winter if they are provided adequate shelter. Dog kennels should be insulated and bedding should be provided. Pets should be able to get out of the wind. Insulating a dog kennel can be as simple as stacking straw bales around the kennel. Without shelter, pets can succumb to frostbite, especially on their ears, or may suffer other cold-weather ailments.

Food.

Provide your pet with consistent meals that are measured. Overweight pets do not necessarily stay warmer in the winter from 'fat'. Instead, overweight pets may have more problems with early arthritis, diabetes and stress to their heart and lungs, brought on by the added stress of cold weather.

The Following factors affect your pet in cold weather:

Acclimation.

Pets need time for their bodies to adjust to cold temperatures. Sudden weather changes, like dogs that go from a warm house to outside, can have more problems with the cold.

Size.

Smaller pets will have more problems with colder temperatures than larger pets with more muscle mass.

Hair coat.

Breeds with a thick hair coat like Huskies can fair much better in colder temperatures, compared to dogs with a thin hair coat such as breeds like the Boxer.

Wind.

Wind chill can lower the outdoor temperature even more. Wind decreases the pet's ability to trap heat in their hair coat. Pet should be able to get out of the wind at all times.

Wetness.

Pets that are wet from sleet or rain can not stay warm for very long. Water decrease's the hair coat's ability to trap air and provide insulation. If your pet becomes wet in the winter, towel dry your pet and bring it to a warm place until it dries.

Health.

Pets that are in poor health may not be able to withstand the cold temperatures. Sick pets or senior pets may need to be moved into a warmer environment such as a garage or provided some type of heated environment. Some companies make heated dog beds that can make pets more comfortable.

Dogs with arthritis can have an especially hard time. Often, arthritic pets benefit from glucosamine supplements or pain medications prescribed by your veterinarian.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.