

Winterizing your pets

We've all been there before – winter rolls in and suddenly the outside world is a bitter, unfriendly place filled with deep chills and frostbitten toes, frozen hair and sudden falls on the ice. Although most of our pets and livestock are blessed with an abundance of hair and can stay warm in conditions that would make the best of us long for a trip down south, that doesn't mean that winter can't be a hardship for them as well.

Short-coated dogs such as Labradors or pit bull crosses should ideally be kept inside or in outbuildings during the worst of the weather to prevent hypothermia. If they are outdoors always, consider building an insulated shelter. All outdoor dogs should have access to an unfrozen water source, as eating snow will significantly lower body temperature and the extra energy needed to melt and process it makes the body prone to dehydration. Food rations may need to be increased slightly as the body burns more calories to keep itself warm. Long-coated dogs should be checked often for 'snowball' build up in the hair around their toes and under the tail. Although not so much of a problem on the flanks and chest, frozen snow buildup can cause lameness or sores on the feet and if severe, can prevent a dog from urinating or defecating comfortably.



If you walk your dog in town, consider using ointment or booties to protect their feet from the harshness of road salt. De-icing compounds used on sidewalks and roads can at best be harsh and irritating to sensitive paw pads and at worst can cause toxicities (particularly in small dogs) if they lick their paws. Wash your dog's feet after walking to prevent this common irritation, and your pet will thank you! Short coated or older dogs (or any dog which seems to feel the cold and shows signs of shivering or anxiety) may benefit from jackets as well as walking during the few hours that the sun shines.



Cats should have warm shelter available at all times if they are outdoors. This includes barn/shop cats! Cat doors can be used to provide an entrance into a covered or heated area, or 'cat boxes' can be made using Rubbermaid tubs and Styrofoam boxes using straw for insulation. There should be one more cat box than number of cats present to prevent any territory fights. Cats should also be checked regularly to ensure no frostbite is developing on the tips of their ears.

Animals with arthritis or other chronic lameness may be worse in the winter, just like us. Consider talking about pain control options with your veterinarian or offering heated beds to help warm old bones. If your pet is struggling with stiffness and soreness, make sure walks are adjusted accordingly and that your pet has plenty of recovery time afterwards. If your older pet is a heat-seeking missile, be careful around space heaters; animals may accidentally burn themselves if they fall asleep too close or rub against a hot surface.



Horses tolerate the cold well, but still watch for signs of cold or discomfort such as shivering. A clipped horse must have a blanket during the cold weather as they will not be able to regulate temperature until their coat grows back. They should always have access to unfrozen water; stock tank heaters or insulated buckets can help if running water isn't available or practical. Like dogs, eating snow will burn more energy and may lower their body temperature further. Also make sure they have a

steady source of food; the act of digestion will raise body temperature and help prevent cold-weather colics or digestive upsets.

Got a question on how to weather-proof your animal? Give us a call at 250-782-5616 and one of our staff will be happy to assist you. Stay warm out there!

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