

Cold Weather Tips for Your Pets



Remember: It's best to house your pets inside with you. It's especially important for some pets to be kept inside, out of the cold. This includes pets that are young, sick, elderly, very small dogs, and dogs with thin fur. Unlike a healthy adult, these vulnerable pets will suffer and may die from the cold.

If you must keep your pet outside follow these steps to protect your pets in cold weather:

SHELTER:

CATS should have a clean, warm place to sleep – perhaps a wood box filled with clean straw bedding.

DOGS should have a good dog house that provides:

- **A dry, draft-free space** that is *big enough for them to sit and lie down* comfortably but *small enough to hold in their body heat*.
- **A floor that is raised a few inches** off the ground and is **insulated with straw** or cedar shavings. (*Note: Change the straw or cedar bedding regularly, every month or sooner if it becomes wet.*)
- **An opening that faces away from the wind** – i.e. turn the house so that the opening does NOT face the West wind. Cover the doorway with burlap or plastic sheeting to help hold in your pet's heat.



EMERGENCY DOG or CAT SHELTER

Buy 6-9 bales of straw (available at Lowes or Southern States at ~\$5/bale), **and a roll or segment of black plastic ~ 12ft x 6ft (landscape staples helpful)**

Place 2 straw bales on the ground about 2 ft apart with 1 bale placed at one end creating a U-shape.

For a small/medium dog or cat, place 2 bales over the top, spanning and covering the open top space (total 5 bales of straw).

Cover this with the plastic sheet tucking the sheet in as needed to prevent it from blowing away (metal landscape staples would be helpful).

For a larger dog, (total 8 bales of straw) stack 3 more straw bales creating a second U-shape on top of the first one (creating more headroom). Then cover the top with the last 2 bales of straw and cover all with black plastic.

Use an extra bale to spread some puffy straw on the floor of the shelter.

WATER: Check your pet's water source daily. Make sure there is plenty of clean water and that it is not frozen!!! If it freezes, break the ice or empty the bowl and replace the water. Use a ceramic or hard plastic water bowl that will not tip over.

FOOD: Feed your pet enough good quality food to keep him/her warm. Dogs and cats need more food in the winter to generate extra heat for warmth.

EXERCISE: Allow your pet to exercise every day. Exercise will help them generate body heat to keep warm. Spend time with your pet, play tug with dogs, take them for a walk. Barking is another way that dogs will generate some heat to stay warm but it is often not appreciated by your neighbors.



GROOMING: Keep your pets' fur groomed and un-matted. Matted fur won't protect them from the cold. **Keep your pet dry.** Wet fur can cause your pet to become extremely cold (hypothermia.)

Watch for signs of frost bite: Pale, gray skin; Skin that's cold and hard ; Tissue looks red when it thaws (and turns black a few days later)

If your pet becomes excessively cold (hypothermia), warm him up slowly. Too rapidly and it may cause more problems for your pet.

Bang loudly on your car hood or honk the horn before starting the engine. Cats in search of warmth often climb into a warm car engine or tire to sleep. Scare them away *before* you start your car!

Straw bales and dog houses can be purchased at outlets for *Lowes* and *Southern States* throughout the Central Virginia region. You can also build a dog house at home using one of several plans available on the internet. Find links and more information at The **Pet Information Resource Center:** www.pirc-cva.info. For those in financial need *Houses of Wood and Straw (HOWS)*, a program based in Ruckersville, provides houses and straw free of charge as available: www.housesofwoodandstraw.org .

If you keep your pet indoors: (bless you!)

Below are tips to help your pet stay healthy indoors and outdoors throughout the winter.

Take dogs out regularly to exercise and potty. Most healthy dogs will be fine in the cold for periods of time. But watch out for hypothermia with vulnerable dogs

Beware of ice-melting chemicals on your pets. Protect your pets' feet from ice-melting chemicals by using fabric boots, and cleaning the feet, legs, and stomach when they come inside. Use a *pet-friendly ice-melt product (available at many pet supply stores) for your own walkways.*

Keep pets away from anti-freeze and other chemicals. Antifreeze, from cars or container spills, is a deadly poison that has a sweet taste that animals like. Wipe up spills immediately. When possible, use *pet-safe antifreeze* made with propylene glycol.

Do not leave a pet alone in a car during freezing weather. A car can act as a refrigerator, holding in the cold and causing the animal to freeze to death.



If there are outdoor cats in your area, bang loudly on your car hood or honk the horn before starting the engine. Cats in search of warmth often climb into a warm car engine or tire to sleep. Scare them away before you start your car!

Make sure snow drifts near your fence don't allow your dog to jump the fence.

Give your dogs plenty of exercise. Exercise helps them generate body heat.

Feed your pet enough good quality food and water. Dogs and cats need more food in the winter if they spend time in the cold and they always need plenty of water.

Make sure your pets have warm beds. Even if your pets are inside, they still need protection from cold and drafts. Buy a pet bed or make a bed using old blankets (often available for little cost at second hand stores such as Goodwill and Salvation Army)

