

Winterizing Your Dog

We're having a real New England winter—and all that comes along with it...frigid temperatures, deep snow, treacherous ice and a dog that still needs to be walked, trained and exercised. Here are some tips to help you deal with all the challenges of the winter of 2009:

❄ Don't hibernate. Vets now believe that dogs, like humans, are susceptible to "Seasonal Affective Disorder," exhibiting many of the same symptoms—sleeping more and turning to comfort food to beat the fatigue and depression. Keep your dog stimulated with exercise & exposure, proper stimulation and consistent training. Can't brave the cold? How about + dog day school!

❄ If you have an athletic, enthusiastic dog, dig out your cross-country skis and train your dog to skijor...the Norwegian sport of pulling you on snow for fun and exercise (see photo above). To learn more, check out http://gonewengland.about.com/od/skijoring/Skijoring_in_New_England.htm

❄ Fashion be damned! Don't embarrass your dog by landing on your butt in front of his friends. Get yourself a pair of STABLicers[®], Yaktrax[®] or Get-A-Grips[®] and you'll stay on your feet, even on the downhill side of icy Beacon Hill. And don't forget booties for your dog, too.

❄ If you opt not to outfit your dog in booties, winter-proof her paws. Wipe a little "Bag Balm[®]" (available at farm-supply, feed, tack shops or www.bagbalm.com) in-between her footpads. When you get home, clean salty paws with a damp, warm facecloth. Salt used on city streets and sidewalks can irritate your dog's pads and her digestive tract when she licks it off.

❄ On your own icy steps and walkways, use dog-friendly alternatives to traditional ice-melt like Safe Paw[®] or Safe Pet Ice Melt[®].

❄ Ten-below and he still won't go??? Teach your dog to go potty on command on any surface (including snow, ice, and slush) in 5 minutes or less. Remember to reward profusely.

❄ Don't leave your dog home in the cold weather. Take her along for the ride. Cover her crate with a blanket when the car is off. The small covered space will insulate your dog and keep her comfortable for short periods of time. Be sure to remove it when you get going again and turn on the heat.

❄ Introduce your dog to your home gym. Teach him to walk and trot on a treadmill for supplemental exercise on extra-cold or stormy days.

❄ Get your dog a winter coat. Indoor dogs don't grow a full winter coat and can't acclimate from 70-degree to 30-degree environments. Keep your dog toasty warm with her own winter coat. In fact, depending upon your dog's breed, you may want to layer two (or even three coats) in extreme conditions.

❄️ Restrict your dog's snow-surfing to fresh powder conditions. A good roll in the snow makes winter more fun but restrict snow-surfing to soft powdery snow. Unless he's wearing his "Doggles[®]," burrowing, tunneling and rolling in crusty, icy snow can result in a painful scratched cornea or ocular infection.

❄️ Use extreme caution if you and your dog are hiking or playing around frozen rivers, lakes or streams. If your dog chases a ball onto the ice and breaks through into frigid water, his body temperature will drop quickly. Dogs can die from hypothermia, just as humans can. Assume the ice is NOT safe and keep your dog away from it.

❄️ Think twice about letting your dog off during a snowstorm—dogs can lose their scent and become disoriented when it snows and easily become lost. More dogs are lost during the winter more than during any other season, so make sure yours always wears ID tags and is microchipped.

❄️ Dogs burn more calories in winter cold. If you are helping her stay active this winter, increase her protein as she burns more calories to keep warm.

❄️ Take a class! Winter is a great time to continue your dog's education. Imagine how much fun you can have this spring and summer with a well-trained well-socialized companion. Jump-start your dog's training now or sign up for **+ dog's** Canine Good Citizen classes, Therapy dog classes and more! See you soon!