

HOLIDAY ISSUES



Animals As Gifts

The holidays are a popular time for welcoming a new furry friend into your family. There may not be a greater gift for homeless animals than to open your heart and home to them. As they do year-round, animal shelters have thousands of wonderful companions available for adoption.

But whether you are considering a new friend for you or someone else, remember that choosing an animal is a big decision. Instead of bringing home an animal right away, consider putting together and wrapping an "adoption kit." Fill a box with toys, a bed, a leash, a collar, food, treats and a gift certificate for adoption fees at your local shelter. Then, make an event of visiting the shelter to find your next best friend!

Remember, millions of homeless animals wait for a home each year! Give the gift of life this year and choose to adopt!

Avoid Easter animals

Thinking about giving your children a bunny or chick as a "special" Easter present? Here are some things to think about first:

- These extremely vulnerable little animals are poorly suited as pets. Although unintentional, the vast majority of the baby bunnies, chicks and ducks that become Easter gifts die within a few weeks.
- They require special feeding, care and consistent temperatures. Small children often break the animals' fragile bones and cause other fatal injuries.
- Animals that do survive the first few weeks are often released to animal care and control agencies, where many must be euthanized because no permanent homes can be found for them.
- You may contract salmonella, which causes severe inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract, from these chicks and ducks. Children are especially vulnerable to this disease.
- At Easter time, you can help prevent cruelty by giving your little ones stuffed animals. And, after the holiday, if your family is ready for a new pet, consider an adorable adoptable dog or cat from your local animal shelter.

Costumes

Pet costumes at Halloween, Christmas and other holidays are one of the latest fads. Who can resist dressing up a pet in those cute little witch capes or reindeer antlers?

Before you give in to this fad, make sure your pet can move freely and won't stumble over a costume that hangs to the ground. And never tie anything around his neck that can choke and strangle him. Opt for a fancy collar instead. Let your pet be the judge. If he struggles and is uncomfortable, then maybe it would be best to let him stay dressed as a Corgi rather than a ghost!



Decorations

Holidays bring special cards, gifts decorated with ribbons, tinsel or yarn, and special decorations like Christmas trees. Unfortunately, animals appreciate these items, as well -- and many of them can cause serious damage.

Christmas trees

- Anchor trees securely. Climbing cats and dogs with wagging tails can knock over your tree.
- Hang breakable, glass ornaments well out of reach. The small glass and metal fastenings can be stepped on or even swallowed by your pet.
- Keep tinsel, ribbons and garland out of pets' reach, especially cats that are intrigued by them. These can become lodged in their intestines, cause obstructions and lead to surgery or death.
- Clean up pine needles frequently. They can be toxic when eaten by your pet.

- Prevent your pet from drinking water in the tree stand if you have added preservative chemicals. These can be poisonous to pets. Also, stagnant water can contain bacteria, which may lead to vomiting and diarrhea if ingested.

Holiday house plants



Although they add a warm touch, many plants can harm your pets. Keep these potentially dangerous bloomers well out of reach.

- Lilies can be deadly to cats, and many types can cause cats to have kidney failure.
- Poinsettias, although not as toxic as people often think, can upset your pet's digestive system.
- Mistletoe, especially the berries, is highly toxic, can cause stomach upset and has the potential to cause fatal heart problems.
- Holly can cause vomiting, diarrhea, nausea and lethargy.
- Certain types of ivy, such as English ivy, can also cause severe harm.
- Amaryllis can cause vomiting and diarrhea.
- Hibiscus can cause diarrhea.

To keep your pet safe year-round, view a list of [toxic](#) and [non-toxic](#) plants.

Lights, candles and fragrance

- Keep lights and extension cords safely secured or covered to deter chewing, which can lead to electric shock or even electrocution. Better yet, invest in pet-proof extension cords, or spray with products such as Bitter Apple or Chew Stop.
- Candles can be fragrant and enticing to pets. But they can be a fire hazard if knocked over by an exuberant pet, and the fumes can be harmful to birds.
- Liquid potpourri and sachets, popular during the holidays, can be very dangerous. Exposure can cause skin or oral damage to your pet and may cause illness or death.

Fireworks

4th of July fireworks are no fun for animals!

July 5 is the busiest day of the year at animal shelters, as companion animals that fled in fright the night before are found miles from their homes, disoriented and exhausted. Anxious families often

find themselves searching the streets and shelters looking for a treasured family member whose fear drove him to jump a high fence or break his leash or chain.

If your pet is upset by thunder, a door slamming or other loud noises, 4th of July fireworks will be utterly terrifying, so take these precautions:

- Your pets won't enjoy the fireworks display, so leave them at home! Keep them inside, shielded from loud noises.
- If loud noises upset your pets, do not leave them alone while you're out celebrating; make sure someone can stay with them.
- If you think your pets should be tranquilized, consult your veterinarian well in advance.
- Contact an animal behaviorist to work with your pets on their fears. With some positive reinforcement and behavior modification training, by next Independence Day, you all may be worry-free!

Food Hazards

Before you give in to those gorgeous, pleading eyes and feed your pet that leftover turkey leg or Halloween candy bar, be aware of the harmful and even deadly consequences of feeding "people" food to any companion animal.

One way to reduce this temptation is to feed your pet before guests arrive, so your pet will be less likely to beg and steal food. Inform your guests of the house rules regarding your pet, such as not feeding him scraps from the table. Also, if your guests smoke, be extra vigilant and keep nicotine and alcohol out of your pet's reach. These can be highly toxic -- even deadly!

Below are some foods that can be harmful to your pet on holidays and year-round:

- Rich, fatty foods, such as turkey skins or gravy can cause pancreatitis, an inflammation of a digestive gland, and can be very painful and serious, leading to hospitalization. Stomach upset, vomiting, and diarrhea can occur if pets consume these items. Limit table scraps, and let your guests know as well.
- Any kind of bone can tear or obstruct your pet's intestinal tract. Make certain all bones are disposed of properly. Poultry bones can be especially dangerous or even fatal to animals.
- Often used to tie the turkey during roasting, strings can tie up your pet's insides, too.
- Found in abundance in turkey stuffing, onions are toxic and can destroy a dog's red blood cells, leading to anemia. Foods containing high amounts of onion powder should also be avoided.
- Grapes and raisins are beautiful to look at but harmful to pets. Keep that cornucopia filled with fresh fruits out of reach. Grapes especially contain toxins that can cause kidney failure.
- Chocolate -- especially baking chocolate -- can actually kill your dog, so keep all such goodies well out of reach. Chocolate can affect the nervous system and cause urinary system and heart muscle damage in your pet. It also contains theobromine, which can be especially harmful to dogs if ingested in large quantities.
- Coffee is also dangerous to animals. Watch out for grounds and whole beans.
- Nicotine is a stimulant that can increase the heart rate leading to collapse, and in the worst case, even death.
- Alcoholic beverages should be kept away from animals year-round.
- Watch the string that ties up the turkey or roast, as well as the little red "pop-up" thermometers. Dogs and cats often eat these tasty things, causing intestinal blockage.



In addition, keep all leftover food out of reach in a closed container. Any garbage can contain toxins such as e-coli that can affect your pet's organs. This includes leftover tinfoil that, when chewed, can obstruct your pet's intestinal tract.

[View a list of substances](#) that are potentially dangerous to your pet.

If you suspect your pet has gotten into a potentially poisonous substance, call your veterinarian immediately! Have the telephone number to your local emergency animal hospital readily available, as well as the number for the national animal poison control center.

Safe Ways to Celebrate

Make the holidays special for your pet

Provide your pet some extra love and attention to let them know they're not forgotten during busy holiday times.

- Take your dog for an extra walk -- it'll help both you and your pet relieve some of that holiday stress.
- Keep a supply of pet treats handy and reach for one before you're tempted to toss your pet that little bite of "people" food.
- Let your pet get into the gift-giving spirit by making a donation (e.g., food, litter, toys) to your local shelter in his name.
- Perhaps your dog would like a new bed, or your cat a new scratching post. Birds love mirrors or other fun items for the cage. Get creative! Enjoy some extra snuggle time.

Whichever treat or special activity you choose, you'll be enhancing the bond you share -- and your pet will love it!

STRESS

Holidays can bring stress to all of us, and pets are no exception. When routines are disrupted and new activities occur, your pet may be the first to notice. Follow these tips to make the holidays more relaxing for everyone, including your companion animals.

- Shy animals can get stressed with the hustle and bustle of holiday guests, so provide a quiet room where your pets can escape the hustle and bustle. Provide plenty of food and water and let your pet catch up on some Zs.

- Holiday guests may not know your pets' routines. If your guests smoke, make sure they are careful with their cigarettes. Also, let them know in advance whether they are allowed to give treats to your animals.
- As your holiday visitors come and go, or as trick-or-treaters come to your door, there will be many escape opportunities for your pets. Make sure that your pets always wear identification tags, and watch the door!
- Always keep your veterinarian's number handy, along with the number of the animal poison control center, in case of emergency.

Black cats *

If you have a black cat, you have a special problem. The mythology about black cats being related to witches can lead strange people to do strange things to them. Even kids who mean no harm may yell when they see a black cat -- scaring the cat much more than the cat scares them.