

Holiday Hints

A Dog Trainer's Tips for a Safe, Fun Holiday Season with Pets

By Darris Cooper, CPDT-KA, FFCP,
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(NAPS)—The holidays are a great time to bond with loved ones, which—for most people—includes beloved pets. Whether you're dressing up in matching outfits and snuggling up at home, enjoying traditions and festivities with family and friends, or traveling for holiday adventures together, these essential tips will help you and your pets navigate a safe, healthy and fun holiday season and beyond:

• Prepare Pets for Big Gatherings:

Pets thrive on routine, so new people, sights, smells and sounds can cause extra stress during the holiday season. Give your pet a calm, quiet place of their own, such as a crate or bed in a room away from the festivities. Training can also help your pet self-soothe when they are feeling stressed or overstimulated. Introduce your pet to new pets and people in a calmer environment before the holiday festivities begin. If this isn't possible, you can still practice meeting new people by inviting a friend over to mimic these interactions and using positive reinforcement to reward desired behaviors. A professional dog trainer can also provide personalized tips to keep your pet comfortable and polite in new situations and festive environments.

• **Heed Holiday Hazards:** The holidays bring festive decorations, new foods and colder weather, all of which can pose risks to pets. Common holiday plants such as poinsettias, ivy, holly and mistletoe can be toxic if ingested, so these should be kept out of pets' reach. Similarly, avoid giving your pet potentially toxic holiday foods such as ham, turkey skin and bones, onions, garlic, candy and chocolate. Holiday decorations are meant to be enjoyed by all, but if you have a frisky feline that likes to knock things over, move breakable decorations out of reach and place glass ornaments higher up on the tree. And, for pet parents living in or traveling to cold climates, be sure your pet is bundled up with gear including a cozy puffer jacket, festive holiday sweater and booties.

• **Travel Safely:** Travel via planes, trains and cars reaches a peak during the holidays. If your pet will join you, plan ahead to confirm pet-friendly hotels, TSA-approved carriers and a special seatbelt or harness for the car. Use a pet travel bag for all the essentials—plenty of your pet's food, travel bowls for food and water, calming supplements, their favorite toys, and a bed or blanket they can use while away from home. For anxious pets, slowly work your way up from exposure to the car, to sitting in it while the engine's off, to longer rides, while rewarding calm behavior along the way. Be sure to consult your veterinarian to rule out any underlying health issues con-



You and your beloved pets may enjoy happier holidays with a few hints.

tributing to anxiety and for your pet's specific needs.

• Start the New Year on the Right Paw:

This year, many people are starting their New Year's resolutions early, and pets should, too. Getting new routines in place now can help lay the groundwork for a healthy and strong start to the new year. Schedule your pet's regular veterinary and grooming appointments and ask about any nutrition or exercise changes if your pet is entering a new life stage. It's always a good time to set goals for a new training regimen, regardless of your pet's age.

• **Celebrate in Style:** No holiday celebration would be complete without gifts and treats. Pets can get in on the fun by snuggling up in holiday pajamas that match their parent's, getting cozy in themed beds such as a snow globe and a dreidel, donning a dapper tree print collar and sporting a festive sweater. Pets can join in baking traditions with a matching oven mitt and dog toy set and an adorable pie-shaped plush dog toy. The dog toy Advent calendar, holiday beverage plush toys and jar of plush pickle toys make great gifts for dogs, while a teaser base with assorted festive attachments, a cat treat Advent calendar and a six-foot cat scratch house are sure to be a hit with cats. For Hanukkah, Petco has a cute "Chewish" plush bone dog toy, dreidel cat teaser, blue fair isle cozy coat, and more.

• **Save on New Pet Essentials:** Petco's new "Welcome to the Family" program features free in-store booklets providing new dog and cat parents with practical guidance and shopping checklists for pet parents created by Petco's expert veterinary, training and grooming teams, plus exclusive discounts on pet services and essentials from top brands.

Learn More

For more tips, guides and gifting inspiration to help you and your pet celebrate the holidays and have a happy and healthy new year, visit a Petco pet care center or petco.com.

• *Darris Cooper is the National Dog Training Manager at Petco. He has worked in the industries of animal training and behavior, pet lifestyle and broadcast journalism, and has been a professional dog trainer for 15 years.*