

# Summertime living should be easy for your pet — and on your home

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM  
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We hear constant media reminders about sun blocks, extra fluid intake and heat warnings while exercising in warm weather months. But we often forget how hard summer weather can be on pets. And pet illness, in turn, can be hard on the home.

Along with regular visits to the clinic and common sense, veterinarians recommend giving dogs, cats or other pet home checks more frequently during the summer months.

Dr. Eric Peck of Acme Veterinary Clinic said that a "big-time summer tip for dog owners is to watch out for ear infections, especially with dogs that swim. And healthy gums are a pale pink."

Also, look for healthy, clear eyes and ears that should be clean and not feel hot to the touch.

Dr. David Burke of Grand Traverse Veterinary Hospital said that a lighter diet is best for pets in the summer and that includes plenty of water. The water should be fresh, changed frequently and kept out of direct sunlight. If a pet seems excessively thirsty or urinating, it should be examined by a vet.

Animal coats should be

healthy, shiny, with only normal seasonal shedding. Skin under the coat should be free of lumps and sores. A clue for owners is the pet's excessive scratching.

Dr. Daniel Aja of Cherry Bend Animal Hospital said that external parasites are a major summer problem for animals. Another big problem during this season is heat stroke, he added.

Heat stroke arises from an extremely high body temperature (rectal 105-110 degrees Fahrenheit) and has symptoms such as lethargy, weakness, collapse, panting or even coma.

Puppies under six months, overweight dogs, or pets that are ill or receiving medication might be at risk. Also, some breeds like English bulldogs, pugs, or Boston terriers that have short, wide heads; large breeds over 7 years; and small breed dogs over 14 can be considered at risk, also.

Both Burke and Aja advise owners to check the whites of the eyes of dogs for red (conjunctiva of the eyes) and gum color, which should be pale, not red.

Vets warn that heat stroke is a life-threatening emergency. Although a dog's normal temperature is slightly higher than a human's, if

the dog's is over 105 degrees, you should contact a veterinarian immediately.

Burke said that there are behavioral differences among pets.

"Cats are less susceptible," he said, "and they generally take care of themselves with respect to heat."

However, he said that dogs love to play and run, and if the owner is active, so is the dog — no matter what. Another home check for heat stroke, said Burke, is to feel the dog's belly. A wet belly is another heat stroke symptom.

Heat exhaustion — less threatening than heat stroke — but still serious, is when a dog's system goes into shock due to loss of electrolytes. The dog may feel cool to the touch, but owners should not try to cool it further.

The dog should be given fluids orally and taken to a vet. Shearing heavy-coated pets for the summer is pro-active good sense. The pet will be cooler, cleaner and it will be easier to check the skin for parasites and infections.

Keeping pets out of mid-day heat and exercising



them early morning or evening is a good summer routine. Owners should try to acclimate pets gradually to high temperatures.

More exotic pets require attention, too. Dr. Marcia Izo of Companion Animal Hospital said, "I have seen rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats, gerbils, hedgehogs, mice and chinchillas. I see at least one exotic pet of some type every week."

These pets deserve special summer care also. Izo says that guinea pigs and

rabbits are especially sensitive to high heat.

"I think there are a lot more pocket pets and rabbits as pets than most people realize," she added.

Aja's list of summer threats to pets includes harmful substances left within a pet's reach: poisonous plants, picnic scraps, swallowing toys or utensils, fireworks and dogs that go after fishhooks (do not pull, call the vet for instructions).

Izo says that foot pad injuries are common in

summer, too, and that owners should check pet's feet frequently.

Peck warns that there are all sorts of hidden dangers like punctures and lacerations from sharp objects or tangles with other animals, both domestic and wild, especially porcupines.

With a little extra attention, pets can find summertime living easy, both outside and inside the home.

Sally D. Ketchum is a local freelance writer.

## Pet projects: Letting your home decor go to the dogs and looking great

Continued from Page 8

color. Not only will a new coat of paint make a dramatic statement, but colored walls are more resistant to the wear and tear animals dish out.

"If you have pets you really have to use satin or eggshell finish," she said. "Flat paint is a no-no because it's really hard to clean and you have to be able to wipe the walls — drool gets slung, cats scratch, dogs lift their legs on the wall, birds fling their food."

"You don't want white walls even if you are using wipeable paint. It's more forgiving to have color on the walls rather than white," Szabo said. "Plus, white slipcovers look dynamic against a colorful wall, even if it's a pale color."

Once the floors, furniture and four walls are finished, the only thing left to do to create a pet-perfect room is add accessories.

"When you have pets you really ought to provide them with their own beds, even if they sleep in your bed," Szabo said.

The problem is that beds made specifically for pets tend to be kitschy — sometimes downright ugly.

Instead of a perusing pillows decorated in bones, paw prints and other patterns that look out of place in a typical home, she suggests finding floor pillows or cushions in fashionable fabrics, making handsome alternatives to the typical dog and cat beds.

Pets also need their own storage. Instead of just piling a pet's playthings in a corner, Szabo suggests searching out storage solutions that pull double-duty,

like Target's Starck Reality stool that opens for storage.

"It's not just eating up space and looking ugly. You can actually use it, or a cat can sit on it," she said.

But what about toys that can't be put away?

"Pet stores have cat scratching posts, but they are not something you want to display in your house," Szabo said, referring to the traditional carpet-covered posts that don't match

today's refined interiors.

Instead of searching for an eye-pleasing scratcher, Szabo recommends making your own.

"Wrap banisters and any exposed pipes with untreated sisal twine from a hardware store," she said. "It's an automatic cat scratcher. It gives them a sanctioned place to scratch, and they aren't going to be tempted to go on the furniture to flex their claws."

Cats also love to climb.

Keep them busy with a handful of semi-circular wall sconces or small wall shelves that form a feline playground, Szabo suggests.

"Cats can jump up there — it's a way for them to enjoy themselves, but it can look good and provides architectural interest," she said.

For relaxing, butterfly chairs with metal frames and fabric seats make great hammock-like hangouts for pets and people alike.

Crate & Barrel offers a steel and cotton butterfly seat in a range of colors for under \$50.

From fish to feathered friends, every pet should be made a part of the family, and, according to Szabo, there is no better way to do that than by incorporating them into our living areas — without sacrificing style.

"I'm anti-segregating the animals," she said. "If we share everything, then the incentive is there to have it look good."

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