MaKs Dog Training

Connection - Not Correction

Winter Paw Care

Simple habits to keep your dog's paws comfortable all winter

The short version: Cold pavement, ice, snow, and de-icing salt are hard on paws. A quick routine helps: protect paws before you go out, then wipe or rinse them and check them over when you come back in.

1. Wipe or rinse paws after every walk

Road salt and de-icing products cling to paws and the fur between the toes, and most dogs will lick them off if they are left there.

- Wipe each paw with a damp cloth, or rinse paws in lukewarm water, as soon as you come inside.
- Dry paws thoroughly afterward, including between the toes. Moisture left between the toes can add to irritation.
- Keep a towel and a bowl of clean water by the door during snowy and icy spells, so the routine is easy to keep up.

2. Check paws every time you come in

A ten-second check catches small problems while they are still small.

- Look for cracks, redness, or sore-looking spots on the pads and between the toes.
- Check for ice or snow packed between the toes. Gently remove what you can, or let it melt off indoors - do not pull at anything that is stuck or sore.
- Watch for signs on the walk itself: lifting a paw, limping, stopping, or licking at a paw.

3. Protect paws before you go out

- **Paw wax:** a thin layer worked over the pads and between the toes before a walk adds a barrier against cold, ice, and salt. Reapply as the product directs.
- **Booties:** boots give the most complete protection. Introduce them indoors first, in short, rewarding sessions, so your dog learns to walk in them comfortably before you rely on them outside.
- Choose plowed or cleared routes where you can, and keep walks shorter when it is bitterly cold or heavily salted.

Warning - antifreeze: Antifreeze is extremely dangerous to dogs, even in small amounts, and its sweet taste can attract them. Keep containers closed and out of reach, clean up any spill right away, and steer your dog away from puddles near driveways, garages, and parked cars. If you think your dog may have licked antifreeze, contact a veterinarian or an emergency veterinary clinic right away.

4. Take extra care with dogs who feel the cold sooner

Some dogs need a lighter winter routine than others:

- **Young puppies** and **elderly dogs** - keep outings shorter and watch them closely.
- **Short-coated dogs** - they lose heat faster and may be uncomfortable sooner.
- **Dogs who are ill** or recovering - follow your veterinarian's guidance on exercise, and err on the side of shorter, gentler outings.

For any dog, head home early if you see shivering, paw-lifting, slowing down, or a reluctance to keep walking.

When to call a veterinarian: This handout covers general winter care only and is not advice for an individual dog. If a paw is cracked, bleeding, swollen, or sore, if your dog is limping or will not put weight on a paw, or if licking and chewing at a paw does not settle, contact your veterinarian rather than treating it at home.

MaKs Dog Training - Private, Individualized In-Home Dog Training
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