Festive survival guide for pets

The festive season can pose dangers for our four-legged friends, so here is a handy guide to ensure everyone has a safe and healthy Christmas.

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Decorative dangers

Baubles, tinsel and flashing lights are part of the festive fun, but they can tempt pets to play with them - leading to disaster.

Dogs explore with their mouths, so it's easy for them to swallow decorations or break larger ones, causing unwanted trips to the vet.

REMEMBER:

- Keep your pets somewhere safe while you decorate
- Hang decorations out of paws' reach
- Try not to leave your pet unattended while decorations are up

Winter plants that are toxic for your pets

Many decorative Christmas plants can be harmful to dogs, cats and small pets, so be careful when bringing them into your home.

Poinsettia. The bright red petals can be poisonous for dogs, cats and small pets like rabbits, causing drooling and stomach upsets.

Mistletoe. If a pet chews on a sprig of mistletoe they may react by drooling, retching and vomiting. Mistletoe is poisonous to all pets and can cause illness.

Ivy. Eating ivy can make your pet vomit, dribble and cause diarrhoea. All parts of the plant are toxic, but the leaves contain the most harmful amounts. Ivy can also cause skin irritation.

Holly. The sharp leaves can injure your pet, but the berries are toxic. Just like with ivy, your pet can become unwell by eating holly, making them vomit, dribble and have diarrhoea.

What if my pet eats a dangerous plant?

If you think your pet has eaten a dangerous plant, contact your vet immediately. Even if you don't see any immediate symptoms, it's better to be safe than sorry.

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Is it ok to dress up my pet?

There are many festive-themed outfits available for pets. If the clothes aren't keeping them warm or safe, then it's best to avoid dressing up your pet. A suitable example includes a high visibility jacket to help keep them safe on busy roads during winter walkies. Here are some important things to think about when it comes to putting anything on our pets:

Can they move properly?
Clothes can be restrictive and get in the way when your pet tries to do normal things.

Is your pet stressed?
Wearing clothes doesn't come naturally to pets and can cause them stress – look for any unusual behaviour.

Can they still communicate?
If your dog is dressed up, other dogs might struggle to read their body language and act aggressively.

Taking your dog to an event

If you're getting away for the festive break, visiting friends and family, or going to a dog-friendly Christmas event, here's our advice for a fuss-free outing.

Plan your trip. Do your research and prepare everything that your dog will need while you're out of the house.

Prepare your dog. Gradually build up your dog on walks to busier places to get them used to loud noises and crowds.

Make sure your dog is comfortable. Consider if taking your dog to this event is the best thing for their health.

Pay attention to hazards. Look out for anything dangerous to your dog, such as grit on the floor.

Top tips for small pets

Rabbits, guinea pigs, and small pets shouldn't be forgotten at Christmas - the excitement and loud noises may unsettle them too.

Mischievous nibblers
Small pets may not be able to reach the top of the Christmas tree, but they are experts at getting their teeth on wires! Remember to keep wires away from their enclosures.

KEEP YOUR SMALL PETS CALM AT CHRISTMAS WITH OUR TIPS:

- **Move their home to a quiet area.** Visitors might unsettle your small pets. Place them somewhere more peaceful as this will keep them calm during the chaos.
- **Keep checking in.** Spend time with your pet and check on them to make sure they're happy.
- **Move them away from TVs, speakers or radios.** Small pets are sensitive to unexpected sounds. Keep them away from any sound outlets to keep them calm.
- **Keep them busy.** Make sure your small pets are occupied with plenty of toys and things to keep them entertained.

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Christmas dinner dangers

Most of us are guilty of overindulging at Christmas, but sudden changes to your pet's diet and exercise regime can lead them to pile on the pounds too.

Lots of the foods we eat at Christmas are high in fat. So, while it can be tempting to treat your pet when you're sitting down to eat your Christmas dinner, remember the number of calories your pet needs is much lower than ours. Pets can often develop vomiting or diarrhoea if their diet changes suddenly, so it's best to stick to their normal food and regular mealtimes as much as possible.

If you want to give them something extra, pick healthy treats and keep up their usual exercise. Or why not treat them to a new toy or longer play time instead?

Which parts of a Christmas dinner are safe for pets?

Lean white meat, such as turkey, or vegetables, like carrots, parsnips or cauliflowers (with no sauce), are a safe and healthy treat you can share with your pets.

PAWS OFF!

Lots of festive goodies can be lethal to pets. So, if you're wrapping up a yummy gift, or one with small parts, make sure you add one of our free PAWS OFF! gift labels (on page 10 and 11).

A pet-friendly Christmas Day

Our Christmas Day guide will help keep your pet safe so everyone can have a fun-filled day.

6-8 am — Opening presents
During the excitement of opening presents, don't forget to keep an eye on your pets around wrapping paper and gifts – especially for choking hazards.

10 am — Pet playtime
Bored pets can be tempted to get into trouble by playing with decorations or sniffing out toxic foods; keep them entertained with a walk or playtime.

12 pm — Cooking Christmas dinner
Hot ovens and boiling pans make kitchens a dangerous place for your pet - keep the kitchen doors closed.

3 pm — An after-dinner nap
This is often the time on Christmas Day when we relax and doze off in front of the TV. Pets might take the opportunity to get their paws on something they shouldn't, so keep anything dangerous out of reach.

6 pm — Visiting family and friends
When visiting loved ones, make sure your pet is secure in the car. A pet seat belt or a pet carrier will keep everyone safe.

9 pm — One last Christmas Day treat
You might want to give your pet a little treat but make sure it's pet-safe, and you're not overfeeding them.

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TOXIC FESTIVE FOODS FOR CATS AND DOGS

It's tempting to give tasty treats at Christmas, but lots of festive foods can be fatal to our furry friends.

Mince pies, Christmas cake and Panettone contain raisins and sultanas, which are highly toxic to dogs and cats and can even be fatal. If you're indulging in a sweet treat, make sure it's out of paws' reach to avoid any accidents.

Chocolate is poisonous to dogs and cats. It can cause sickness, fits, and be deadly if eaten in toxic amounts. Pets, especially dogs, can sniff food out very quickly, so keep advent calendars, chocolate tree decorations and gifts out of paws' reach!

Stuffing and gravy usually contain onions and garlic, which can be deadly for cats and dogs. Remember that other sauces may contain these as well, so be sure to check the ingredients first.

Alcohol can cause serious sickness for pets, so if you're enjoying a tipple, be mindful where you leave your glass. Remember to avoid giving your pet any food that contains alcohol as well.

Bones (whether cooked or raw) are hazardous. They can cause constipation, blockages, and injuries to the mouth, teeth, throat, and oesophagus (food pipe). They can also splinter, causing damage to the stomach and intestines.

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Preventing stress

Some pets love the hustle and bustle of Christmas, but many find the noise and disruption stressful.

To prevent stress, give your pet **somewhere quiet** to escape to, like a **cosy den** or place their bed in a quiet room away from the noise, where they can **rest**. Even the most social pets need a break from busy environments - you can encourage them to take some time out by adding a few tasty, pet-friendly treats to their quiet sanctuary.

For more advice on fireworks, visit our full guide by searching **'PDSA pets and fireworks'**

Pets and fireworks

Many people like to see in the new year with a bang, but the flashes and crashes of fireworks can be overwhelming for our furry friends.

Luckily, with the right care, you can help keep your pet calm with our top tips.

TOP TIPS:

- Make a den
- Play music and sounds
- Keep pets inside
- Close external doors, curtains and door flaps
- Walk them while it's still light
- Consider a pheromone plug-in
- Comfort your pet normally
- Desensitise your pet to loud noises a few months in advance
- Contact your vet if your pet is struggling

PAWS OFF!
CONTENTS
UNSUITABLE
FOR PETS
I chose this gift with you in mind BUT it's not suitable for the furry kind!
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