

Keeping your pets safe over the festive period

The festive season can bring joy and merriment to many but it can also be a very busy, noisy and stressful time, especially for pets. Your pets routine may become disrupted and for the more timid pets the extra visitors to your home that the season brings can be frightening, not to mention your home will be filled with unfamiliar objects (e.g. gifts and decorations) that may smell unusual to your pet. Some of these objects may even represent a danger to your pet if swallowed or played with. Therefore, to ensure that everyone in your household enjoys the festive period follow these simple tips.

Help keep your pet feeling safe and relaxed

Many cats will want to hide when visitors come to the house, whereas most dogs will get excited, however, this excitement can actually be stressful. Make sure that both cats and dogs have a safe hiding place that they can retreat to if things get too noisy for them. This may be a bed in a quiet room where they won't be disturbed or it could be a den made especially for them under the stairs or your bed. In the lead up to the party season encourage your pet to this quiet place by offering them treats there so that they associate positive feelings with it and are likely to go there when they need a break. Never disturb your pet when they are using this resting place. If your dog does tend to get excited when visitors arrive make sure he has had plenty of exercise prior to their arrival so that he is less likely to become excited. For those that jump up or become worried by visitors arriving put them in another room until your visitors have settled in then allow them out to come and say hello. This will be much less exciting for your dog and he is likely to settle down more quickly. Alternatively if you plan on spending whole days away from your home visiting friends and family make sure that your pets have been well exercised and have sufficient food and water. Also leave them with entertainment such as toys and puzzle feeders to stop them getting bored or lonely in your absence.

Party food

Many owners are keen to involve their pets in all of the festivities and this may include giving them some of your own food as a treat. Although the odd treat might not be harmful to your pet (unless they have a sensitive tummy), too many and they are likely to put on weight and suffer the associated health problems. Some human foods can also be harmful for your pets, including coffee, alcohol, chocolate, onions, garlic, raw meat and bones, Xylitol (sweetener), yeast dough, salt, spicy food, some nuts, grapes, raisins and fatty foods. It is much safer to give your pet a normal pet treat you know that they enjoy or buy them a new toy as a gift.

Decorations

Make sure your Christmas tree is well secured so that it does not topple over and make sure that any tree decorations are non-breakable so that even if a wagging tail or an inquisitive paw knocks them off they won't shatter. Only put lights on the upper branches of your tree so your pet cannot chew on them causing shards of glass or plastic to cut their mouths or stomach lining. Consider only putting tinsel on the higher branches as well as it can twist around your pet's intestines if swallowed. If you have a real tree, cover the base so that your pet cannot drink the water, which may be stagnant or contaminated with preservatives and regularly sweep up fallen pine needles which can puncture intestines if swallowed. Cover, hide or otherwise keep out of your pet's reach any electrical cabling which can cause shock or burns if chewed and keep snow globes well out of reach of pets as many contain anti-freeze which is poisonous to pets. If one does break keep your pet out of the room while you clean it up. Use plenty of water to dilute the spillage and use a pet-safe cleaning product. You should also never leave a candle burning while unattended as these can burn your pet or be knocked over by a wagging tail causing a fire. Similarly open fires should be secured with a fire guard to avoid singed fur or bad burns. Household plants common at this time of year, including holly and mistletoe can also be harmful to your pet but you should check all of the plants or cut flowers you normally have in your house, such as lilies, as these may also be harmful if chewed or brushed against.

Tidy up

Make sure you tidy away any small objects or pieces of plastic that might have been discarded after opening gifts as they can be easily swallowed causing choking or intestinal blockages. You should also make sure that batteries are not left lying around as these can cause burns to your pet's mouth if chewed.