

Keeping Your Pets Cool in Summer

By Patricia Horwell

Tampa Bay is considered the second-best area in the country for dog lovers, according to one study. And International Cat Day on Aug. 8 and National Dog Day on Aug. 26 are great reminders that our beloved fur babies need extra TLC during the summer months.

Just as we humans suffer through the so-called “dog days” of summer, so do our pets — dogs, cats, birds, rabbits and other animals. We can help make sure they stay cool, too.

First, recognize symptoms of overheating in pets. Be on the lookout for excessive panting or difficulty breathing, increased heart and respiratory rate, drooling, seizures, bloody diarrhea, vomit or a body temperature of more than 104 degrees. Animals with flat faces, like pugs, French bulldogs and Persian cats are particularly vulnerable. Call your vet or visit an ER if you suspect heatstroke; it can be fatal.

Keep your pets indoors as much as possible. Just as you wouldn't walk barefoot on hot asphalt, don't permit your dog to do it. A dog's body can heat up quickly and sensitive paw pads can burn. Consider carrying water with you when out with your pooch.

NEVER leave your pet alone in a locked car. According to the CDC, on an 80-degree day the temperature inside a car will hit 109 degrees. After 40 minutes, the temperature can rise to 118 degrees and after an hour, to 123 degrees. In Sarasota, police can enter your locked, parked car by whatever means necessary to save your pet. Leaving your pet locked in the car is considered animal cruelty.

Consider these other tips to keep your pets cool and happy:

- Make sure fresh water is always available. Adding an ice cube to it makes for a cool summer cocktail.
- If your dog likes to swim with you, make sure it isn't left unsupervised around the pool or pond. Invest in a



flotation device made specially for dogs. Don't let them drink from the pool or the Gulf and rinse them off with fresh water after a swim.

- If your home is warm, many cats and dogs enjoy relaxing on a cooling mat, available in pet stores and many online pet supply sites. Or use a cooling body wrap or vest. Freeze bottles of water, wrapping them in a towel and leaving them in spots your pet likes to hang out. Let your dog have a cooling soak. Some pets prefer lying on a cool tile floor or even in your bathtub. Birds enjoy splashing in a shallow dish of water or being misted with cool water.
- Trim longer hair on your dog, but don't shave it. The layers of a dogs' coats protect them from overheating and sunburn. Brush your cats more often than usual to prevent overheating. Make sure any sunscreen or insect repellent you use on them is safe for animal use. Be especially careful applying anything to your cat as cats will ingest anything on their fur as they groom themselves.
- Make your dog pupsicles (recipes available online).

Have a safe and fun summer with your pets.