

HEALTHY, HAPPY PETS: EMBRACING

By Joyce Belcher

WINTERS IN MAINE CAN BE long and hard but for those of us who live here it's a way of life. Embrace the season, get out and have fun with our pups. Maine offers miles of pet friendly cross country ski trails, hikes, snowshoeing and walks as well as places to cozy up with your pup if you want to weekend away. There is no shortage of fun activities to help keep us all fit. We love to walk on the trail that wraps around the ocean with breathtaking scenery at Fort Foster in Kittery, a state park that allows dogs. Many state parks no longer allow dogs such as Baxter state park, the endpoint of the Appalachian trail.

Did you know that over 60 parks have been closed to dogs in the state of Maine due to pet owners not picking up their pets' poop? This is unfair to all of us that live in Maine, we must respect our beautiful parks, even support them. There is no reason or excuse to leave your pets' poop on the ground of any public place. Most parks that are dog friendly even offer FREE poop bags and a bin to put them in after use. Nonetheless, be prepared and bring your own bags with you; use and carry out. It's that simple and that necessary if we want to continue to enjoy having our pups walk in the beauty we have here in Maine (or anywhere). Remember carry in and carry out belongs to all litter not just paper and plastic so preserve yours and our heritage please.

After the above statement, Maine is still one of the most pet-friendly states in the country, so it's no surprise that it's also very pet-vacation friendly. VisitMaine.com has a section about vacationing with pets, listing everything from hotels to restaurants that are pet-friendly.

The York Harbor Inn, in York Harbor offers a luxurious historic 1730 dog-friendly house located a half mile from the main resort property where all guests' check-in, including the furry ones. Maine beaches are open 24/7 to dogs in the winter and Long Sands beach in York at low tide offers miles of great running.

The Harraseeket Inn in Freeport offers a dog bed, dog bowls and clean-up supplies and is close to several good hikes nearby including Wolfe's Neck Farm and Bradbury Mountain State Park, both are still dog friendly.

If you're up for a getaway in Maine with your pup, use this

link to check out some of the 519 dog-friendly cities or towns in Maine, some with miles of terrain for you to romp and roam off-leash. <http://mainetoday.com/maine-travel/pet-friendly-trips-can-vacation-maine-pets-takes-planning/>

Some advice when booking rooms with your pet is to be clear about their pet policy as many hotels charge a fee for pets and may have a weight restriction while some rental cabins may require to know your breed so they can approve the stay due to insurance regulations, it's best to know before you go so you're not disappointed.

Remember to pack all your dog's essentials and paperwork so you can just relax once you arrive.

- Collar and halter (I prefer the halter for hikes in case you need to assist your pup with a climb) with ID tag including your cell phone number, if you're staying in one place, a vacation tag with your temporary address is a good idea.
- Leash – good to have an extra one in the car
- Plenty of food and treats – I always bring extra
- Water and bowls – Maine-Made Squishy Bowls™ are perfect for backpacks.
- Canine first aid kit - Probiotics or a GI Elixir are a good idea in case they eat something on the trail, a salve that is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal that is easy to pack, gauze pads, self-adhering paw bandages, powdered coconut water in case electrolytes are needed
- Poop bags – leave no trace!
- Clean dog bed – many places provide one but having their own familiar bed helps a dog feel at home.
- Towels and a grooming brush
- Favorite toys – a must!

Towns that salt the sidewalks and other walking areas pose different health challenges, here are some things you should know before setting out on a walk with your pup to keep him safe and comfortable.

Did you know that salt and most ice melt products can be extremely irritating and toxic to your dog?

This is the time of year where tons of salt is spread on sidewalks,

WINTER WITH YOUR BEST FRIEND





driveways and roads to melt ice and snow. This salt is corrosive enough to harm the paint and metal of our cars as well as having a destructive effect on our fresh water ecosystem. It affects plants, fish and the animals that eat or absorb the toxicity of it, especially through their pads.

Two winters ago, I was in Portland and saw a dog tied to a post lifting first one paw, then another, then another. You get the picture of the dance I'm trying to describe here. This poor dog was standing tied where a pile of this salt was dumped and he had no option, he danced and whimpered as his feet were burning while his owner enjoyed the warmth of Starbucks. The visual will never leave me.

The pieces of salt can get stuck between

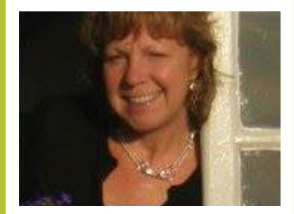
our dog's pads where their natural moisture can heat the salt up to 170 degrees causing great discomfort on a very sensitive area. Then they lick their feet to clear the pain bringing the corrosive chemical to their lips and tongue, perhaps even their eyes if they rub them with their paws. Most ice melt products that are used on our city sidewalks, roads, even walkways in residential and commercial areas consist of calcium chloride or sodium chloride as the main ingredient which can cause diarrhea and/or vomiting when ingested. That's not the only way they can ingest the chemicals, they also bite the snow when playing and drink from puddles. Even if the ice melt product isn't visible, it may still be on the surfaces they walk or lay on. If you must use a product to melt ice in your own environment to prevent the dangers

of slipping and falling, look for one that is truly pet safe. I've used Safe Paw™ successfully when the ice at my shop was too thick to manage. It may take a bit longer to melt the ice, but there a couple of brands that do work well without harming your dog or the environment.

Keeping their feet and pads protected from snow by stopping the "snowball" build up between the toes which can cause pain and injury is the first step to happy feet I recommend good paw butter that is made from healthy ingredients, petroleum free. Our Protect-a-Paw™ is an all organic Maine made paw butter, providing a barrier against freezing snow and salt absorption as the pads of their feet absorb whatever contacts with them.



Joyce Belcher is a certified herbalist-formulator specializing in organic supplements and medicinals for animals. She resides in York, ME, and is the founder of Herbs for Life, Inc., manufacturer of the Pet Wellness Blends™ and Veterinary Botanicals™ product lines. Ms. Belcher has spent years advancing her herbal studies mentoring with several highly-respected experts in the field of veterinary herbalism. Her areas of expertise include immune balance, the prevention and treatment of Lyme disease in dogs and horses, and custom medicinals in veterinary herbalism. In her practice, Joyce Belcher formulates herbal medicine and supplements for holistic and integrative veterinarians and educates animal owners to be proactive in caring for the health of their animals. She helps owners make informed decisions by speaking to groups through equine and canine symposia and working dog foundations and is a columnist for Dog's Naturally Magazine. She also teaches western herbs for animals to herbal apprentices at herbal schools in New England. You can call 207-451-7093 or go online: www.petwellnessblends.com



There are some great boots/booties for dogs that stay on well and are comfortable for them to wear. Be sure to get the right size for your size of dog feet. Ruff Wear™ is a brand that I've had for years and find easy to use, stays on well and are still like new after 7 years of use.

SOME COMFORTING TIPS WHILE HIKING, SNOWSHOEING OR CROSS COUNTRY SKIING WITH YOUR DOG:

Water consumption during exercise is important in all seasons and typically is less accessible on trails during freezing temperatures. Carry water and encourage drinking in any temperature. If you need a little help enticing Fido to drink you can offer coconut water which can be found powdered to mix as needed or liquid in

lighter weight cardboard jugs. Most dogs love the sweet flavor of pure, plain coconut water. It's loaded with essential electrolytes and a little goes a long way to help keep the body hydrated and balanced. If you've never introduced coconut water to your pup, I would suggest trying some at home before setting out on a trek to be certain that he or she will be compliant with their new-found beverage.

While our winters can be long and unforgiving, keeping our pets safe and healthy in the cold winter months is essential to enjoying our time outside with them. I'm certain by following a couple of preventative tips for your pups comfort and safety, you'll have no regrets for getting out and playing more often. After all, our dogs deserve a healthy, active lifestyle.

A fun tidbit: Per the American Veterinary Medical Association, the percentage of U.S. families with pets is double the number of families with children, ruff!