



PET-SAFE HOLIDAYS

Tips to Keep Them Merry and Safe

by Sandra Murphy

Holidays promise joy and celebration, but the festivities can also lead to stress and anxiety for people and pets. It is important to remember that visiting strangers, a tree, shiny ornaments, gifts to sniff and food to beg for can pose danger for pets.

Maintain Calm

Christina Chambreau, a homeopathic veterinarian, author and educator in Sparks, Maryland, suggests that petting a dog or cat several times a day can lower stress levels and instill a sense of normalcy. “Flower essences like Bach’s Rescue Remedy help attain calm,” she says. Add it to a pet’s water bowl in the days before a party or drop it directly onto the tongue if unexpected guests arrive. All-natural ingredients make daily use safe for pets and humans.

Avoid Bad Foods

“Fatty dishes are a problem, from oily potato pancakes to rich gravies for the turkey,” says Ann Hohenhaus, a veterinarian at the Animal Medical Center, in New York City. “Spilled food, unguarded pans and forgotten eggnog or liquor put animals at risk for severe gastrointestinal upset.”

Other common holiday fare can also pose a significant danger for pets:

- Chocolate—especially dark chocolate and dry cocoa powder—can cause seizures and heart arrhythmia.
- Onions, often used in dressing, can cause anemia in pets.
- Raw, yeasty bread dough expands when ingested, potentially causing bloat, a deadly twisting of the stomach.
- Raisins and grapes in desserts, cookies and fruitcakes can cause kidney failure in dogs.
- Nutmeg is toxic for pets.

The trash can itself contains numerous hazards for furry family members. The string that binds roasted meats is tempting and may require surgery to remove if ingested. Trimmed fat can mean pancreatitis. Swallowed bones pose a dire threat to the entire digestive tract.

Provide Good Foods

Naked foods are best. Pets don’t need brown sugar, marshmallows, butter, salt or gravy to appreciate a treat.

“Unless there’s a special diet, share skinless turkey breast, sweet potatoes and green beans,” says Dana Humphrey, aka The Pet Lady, in New York City. “There’s always a friend or relative who thinks one taste won’t hurt. Turkey or sweet potato jerky and homemade treats let guests dole out risk-free bites.”

Pet-Wise Tree and Candles

Preservatives that keep the evergreen tree fresh can turn tree water into a drinking hazard for pets. Mesh netting or screen wire allows the addition of fresh water, but prevents pets from quenching their thirst.

Tinsel, garland and ribbon bits are easy to swallow, glass ornaments can cut and tree needles aren’t digestible. Small dreidels become choking hazards, so play while the dog sleeps and put toys away when done.

For safety, add edibles to the stockings at the last minute. Keep light cords out of sight and unplug them when not in supervised use to preempt chewing. Carefully monitor lit candles: A wagging tail or leaping cat can knock them over and start a fire. Update holiday candles with rechargeable, battery-operated versions for a pet-safe holiday glow.

Pet parents everywhere employ creative strategies to ensure maximum mirth and safety during the holidays. Mystery writer Livia Washburn Reasoner opted for a tabletop tree in her Azle, Texas, home, “because our rescued Chihuahuas, Nora and Nicki, peed on the tree skirt.”

In Festus, Missouri, retired school bus driver Darlene Drury suggests that a baby’s recycled playpen or a dog’s exercise pen can separate pets from holiday trees.

Patricia Fry, author of the *Klepto Cat* mysteries, in Ojai, California, decorates the lower branches of her tree with unbreakable ornaments and puts more fragile ornaments out of her cats’ reach.

Other Options

If a large party is planned, a guest is allergic or many children will be present, consider boarding a pet. “Slipping out the door as guests arrive is a hazard,” says Veterinarian Carol Osborne, owner of the Chagrin Falls Pet Clinic, in Ohio. “If your pet is very young, very old, pregnant, aggressive and/or suffers with a chronic disease, consider personal pet sitters, kennels, pet hotels and doggie spas to ensure a joyous holiday.”

Pet-proof the house by getting down to the pet’s level and make a family schedule to take turns keeping track of four-footed friends. Then the whole family, pets included, can enjoy the season worry-free.

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holiday pet treats recipes

The number of servings will vary depending on the choice of treat shapes. Keep in mind—never allow nutmeg or sugar-free products with Xylitol in dog treats.

Gingerbread Cookies

Even though this recipe is similar to a gingerbread recipe for us, it's important to never use nutmeg with canine recipes. Nutmeg is toxic to dogs.

- 1½ cups flour
- 1 Tbsp ground ginger
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ cup molasses
- ¼ cup filtered water
- 2 Tbsp vegetable oil

Preheat oven to 325° F.

Combine dry ingredients and mix together. In a separate bowl, combine the molasses, water and vegetable oil and mix together.

Using a wooden spoon, slowly mix the liquid into the flour mixture. Stir well until dough has a uniform color.

Roll dough ¼-inch thick on floured surface. Use cookie cutters to cut into desired shapes and place on a parchment-lined cookie sheet.

Bake for 20 minutes. Allow cookies to cool completely before feeding. They can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

Blue Oatmeal Cookies

- 1 cup oats
- 1 cup flaxseed
- 1 cup blueberries
- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- ½ cup plain yogurt
- Filtered water as needed

Preheat oven to 350° F.

In a food processor or coffee grinder, turn oats into oatmeal powder and grind flaxseed if necessary. Purée the blueberries.

Combine dry ingredients. Fold in the yogurt and blueberry purée. Add a little water to create smooth dough.

Spoon dough into hands and form small dough balls. Shape into cookies and arrange them on a greased cookie sheet.

Bake for 20 minutes, then flip and bake an additional 10 minutes. Cool completely before feeding.

Pumpkin Cookies

- 1½ cups oat flour
- 1½ cups brown rice flour
- ½ cup canned pumpkin—look for BPA-free cans (use plain pumpkin, not pumpkin pie filling)
- 1 egg
- 2 Tbsp molasses
- 1 Tbsp honey
- Filtered water as needed

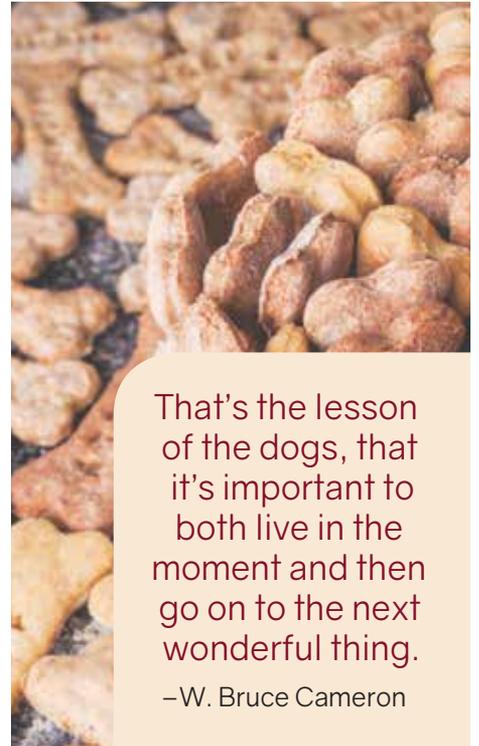
Preheat oven to 350° F.

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Add water slowly until dough forms a ball.

Roll dough ¼-inch thick on floured surface. Use cookie cutters to cut into desired shapes. Arrange on a greased cookie sheet.

Let treats cool completely before allowing dogs a taste test. Store in an airtight container for up to two weeks in the refrigerator or freeze for later use.

Recipes courtesy of Birgit Walker, author of Chew on This: Homemade Dog Treat Recipes, in Phoenix.



That's the lesson of the dogs, that it's important to both live in the moment and then go on to the next wonderful thing.

—W. Bruce Cameron