



Summer Splash

Doing the Doggie Paddle

by Lee Walker

Spanning the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, summer's longer, warmer days inevitably heat up average water temperatures in swimming pools, rivers, ponds, lakes and oceans across the country. It's the perfect lure to prompt fun in the water; one that dogs, too, often can't resist.

Many canines love water sport as much as their human companions do. Fortunately, some counties designate dog beaches suited to sandy romps at surf's edge, typically limited to only splashing paw deep. But this won't dampen Fido's spirits if he can doggie paddle in a neighboring pool, pond or lake. Beyond enjoyable physical exercise, four-legged swimming is particularly good for arthritic joints.

Such outdoor play can, however, pose a few health challenges, such as sunburn and exposure to chemicals. Despite their all-over body hair, canines are still subject to sunburn and skin cancer; both can be avoided by applying a sunscreen made for dogs with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. Most sunscreen sprays provide extra protection from ultraviolet rays on ears, nose and muzzle.

It helps to lightly spray the entire coat of light-colored shorthaired breeds. When possible, add the protection of a sunshade or umbrella to block the sun's most potent rays, between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Many pools and ponds are treated with chemicals that can cause a pooch

some skin irritation. Chlorine dries his coat and may make him sick after he licks it. Ponds often contain runoff from fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, which can make a dog seriously ill. Too much consumption of such contaminated water can possibly result in death. Even saltwater might cause skin irritation. The best solution is always a quick bath and toweling after a swim. Carefully dry ears to prevent infections. Dry paws to avoid irritation from sand or salt.

Not all dogs have an instinct for recreational swimming. Most, however, learn to enjoy an occasional swim if introduced to the water at an early age. Companions must never force an animal to enter the water; rather, make sure that their first experience is a positive one, in a quiet place with shallow water.

Experts recommend starting with a brisk walk along the water's edge, staying connected via a long leash. Once a comfort level has been established, move on to a game of splash ball at the water's edge. The next step is wading in, no deeper than the animal's belly level. Around deeper waters, make sure the dog is wearing a well-fitted canine life jacket and a long, nylon lead. Always identify an easy exit point, such as an accessible ramp or ladder, that the animal is familiar with and knows how to use.

Finally, provide fresh drinking water—a key component of any swimming experience.