

pet connection

Q & A

Keeping dogs out of the box



A covered cat box may keep some dogs out.

Q: Our dog finds our cat's litter box irresistible. It's a disgusting habit, and we can't break her of it, even with spankings and yelling at her. It just makes her sneakier. Have you ever written about this? What can we do?

— K.I., via e-mail.

A: We get this question constantly. Litter boxes are irresistible to many if not most dogs: They're drawn to the undigested protein that remains in feline feces. Faced with a constant supply and ready access, no dog will be able to resist for long, which is why efforts to train your pet haven't been successful.

The better plan would be to restrict access, which can be accomplished in many ways, including:

- Covered litter boxes. You can find litter boxes with lids at almost any pet-supply store, and this might fix the problem. Cats who have asthma shouldn't use them, some cats won't use them, and some dogs are strong enough (or small enough) to get to the box anyway. But for some households, a covered box will solve the problem.

- Change the litter box location. Make any change slowly, so as not to discourage litter box use by your cat. But it doesn't hurt to experiment with such things as moving the litter box to a location above the dog's reach.

- Provide barriers. One way is to rig a door so it stays open wide enough for the cat but not for the dog. One friend of mine did this by putting hooks on the edge of a door and the door jamb, and then by putting a length of chain between them to allow the door to stay open wide enough for the cat, but not for the dog. Another possibility is to cut a cat-sized hole through the door to the litter box room. For a small dog who's able to fit through any opening a cat can, a baby gate is an alternative: The cat can jump over it, but the dog cannot.

Experiment with what works, and realize that punishment doesn't work when the reward is as wonderful (to your dog) as the litter box contents. This is one case in which training the family to make adjustments usually works much better than trying to train the dog.

— Gina Spadafori

(Do you have a pet question? Send it to petconnection@gmail.com.)

Grooming for Health



Regularly brushing pets keeps them healthier — and cuts down on shedding, too!

Regular Coat Care Can Spot Problems Early

By Dr. Marty Becker
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Universal Uclick

Beauty is more than skin-deep when it comes to your dog. Keeping your pet well-groomed not only gives you a clean-smelling companion, it also helps keep your dog more comfortable and allows you to spot health problems before they become serious, even life-threatening.

How important is grooming to your pet's comfort? Consider a simple mat, so easy to overlook. Have you ever had your hair in a ponytail that was just a little too tight? A mat can feel the same way to your dog, a constant pull on the skin. Try to imagine those all over your body, and you have a good idea how uncomfortable an un-groomed coat can be.

Your dog need never know what a mat feels like if you keep him brushed and combed — but that's just the start of the health benefits. Regular grooming allows you to look for lumps, bumps and injuries, while clearing such things as mats and ticks from his coat. Follow up with your veterinarian on any questionable masses you find, and you may detect cancer early enough to save your pet's life.

For shorthaired breeds, keeping

skin and coat in good shape is easy. Run your hands over him daily, a brush over him weekly, and that's it.

For other breeds, grooming is a little more involved. Breeds such as collies, chows, Keeshonden and Alaskan malamutes are "double-coated," which means they have a downy undercoat underneath harsher long hair. The down can mat like a layer of felt against the skin if left untended. To prevent this, divide the coat into small sections and brush against the grain from the skin outward, working from head to tail, section by section. In the spring and fall — the big shedding times — you'll end up with enough of that fluffy undercoat to make a whole new dog. Keep brushing and think of the benefits: The fur you pull out with a brush won't end up on the furniture, and removing the old stuff keeps your pet cooler in the summer and lets new insulation come in for the winter.

Silky-coated dogs such as Afghan hounds, cockers and Maltese also need constant brushing to keep tangles from forming. As with the double-coated dogs, work with small sections at a time, brushing from the skin outward, and then comb back into place with the grain for a glossy, finished look. Coats of this type require so much attention that

having a groomer keep the dogs trimmed to a medium length is often more practical. In fact, experts say that the pets who shed the least are longhaired dogs kept trimmed short by a groomer.

Curly and wiry coats, such as those on poodles and terriers, need to be brushed weekly, working against the grain and then with it. Curly coats need to be clipped every six weeks; wiry ones, two or three times a year (but clipping every six weeks will keep your terrier looking sharper).

Good grooming is about more than keeping your pet looking beautiful and clean-smelling, although that's certainly one of the pleasant payoffs. Regular grooming relaxes the dog who's used to it, and it becomes a special time shared between you both. A coat free of mats, burrs and tangles, and skin free of fleas and ticks, are as comfortable to your dog as clean clothes fresh from the wash are to you. It just makes you feel good, and the effect is the same for your pet.

Some added benefit for you: Giving your dog a tummy rub after every session is sure to relax you (and your dog, of course) and ease the stress of your day. And for allergy sufferers, keeping a dog clean may make having a dog possible.

Keep pets away from antifreeze

Pet lovers have two ways to protect their animal companions from lapping away at deadly antifreeze — one relatively foolproof, the other not.

- Not foolproof: Use a safer antifreeze made from a different formulation than the more popular variety, store chemicals properly, and wipe up spills promptly. While this should eliminate most of the risk for dogs, these strategies are not foolproof for free-roaming cats because you cannot control what your neighbors will do when it comes to using or storing deadly

chemicals.

- Foolproof: Keep cats inside. Free-roaming cats have relatively short life spans because the outside world is full of deadly hazards. To antifreeze, add cars, coyotes (even in cities!) and cat-hating neighbors to the list of things that can kill a free-roaming cat.

If you even suspect that your pet has gotten into some antifreeze, get him to the veterinary clinic immediately. There's no "wait and see" period with this stuff.

— Dr. Marty Becker

pet buzz

FDA 'widget' gets recall news out



About 3,000 veterinarians are also certified as specialists.

- If you see information on pet health pop up automatically on the Web site of your veterinary hospital, favorite pet-related blog or other pet-care site, what you've likely noticed is the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's new "widget." The widget is a small graphic that's easily added to any Web site by following instructions on the FDA site (www.fda.gov/pethealthwidget). Once loaded onto the host site, the graphic updates automatically with news and information from the federal agency, including recall notifications and information on how to report problems with food or medications.

- An animal resulting from the physical mingling of very early embryos of two species, thus having four parents, is known as a "chimera." One such chimera is the "geep," a mix of a sheep and goat. Six geeps were born at the Institute of Animal Physiology in Cambridge, England, in 1984, but only one had blood proteins from both sheep and goats and patches of goat hair and sheep wool. With a true hybrid, the embryo would need genetic material from both species mixed at conception, half coming from one parent, and half from the other. A hybrid goat/sheep would be sterile, because the animals have mismatched numbers of chromosomes — goats have 60 and sheep, 54.

- Veterinary specialists working in the pet-care field — as opposed to academia, industry or large-animal medicine — number at about 3,000, based at approximately 746 practices of all types and sizes. So says the American Animal Hospital Association (aahanet.org) in a 2005 benchmarking study that looked at the growth of specialists in veterinary medicine. Veterinary system specialties include cardiology, radiology, dermatology, ophthalmology, emergency and critical care, and surgery, along with species specialists certified in avian or feline medicine.

- The heaviest land mammal and the second tallest animal is the African elephant, with the tallest males measuring 12 feet tall. The elephant's height doesn't compete with the giraffe's, the tallest of which can be 19 feet tall.

— Dr. Marty Becker and Mikkel Becker Shannon