

the CANINE CORNER

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If you are reading this column on an August winter's evening with a wood burner, gas fire, or fireplace alight, chances are your inside dog will be parked in front of it. Many dogs feel the cold of winter and crave warmth.

Obviously, some hardy breeds that are bred for the cold (think Newfoundland, Siberian Husky and so on) are much more likely to tolerate winter weather.

Breeds that are naturally thin or which have thin coats like my Greyhound are much more likely to need support during winter.

Breed is not, by itself, a firm indicator that a dog will or will not be affected by the cold, however.



For example, 2½ year old Jax (above), a very fit Huntaway cross who runs marathons with his mother, requires a coat most days and his favourite place is tucked up under a blanket on a chair. (photo)

Older dogs of any breed have an increased risk of feeling the cold. Their bodies are less able to self-regulate to generate warmth.

As an analogy, I think about the number of grandmas who wear a cardigan even in the summer.

Older, warm-blooded mammals feel the cold! If arthritic, cold can also trigger stiff joints and arthritic pain.

Heat rises. I recommend that my clients get down on the floor at their dog's height to judge the temperature difference.

Down there, unless you have underfloor heating, it will often be several degrees colder and you will more easily feel the draughts that your dog may be exposed to.

So, knowing that their dog is susceptible to a chill, owners can adopt a variety of solutions. Coats are an obvious choice.

I have one client who not only leaves her dog in a coat for the day, but also heats her dog's insulated outdoor kennel with a fan heater before leaving for work (right).



I'm personally concerned about the use of space heaters (gas bottles, electric bar heaters and the like) around dogs.

I met a Border Collie at the dog park many years ago who had a distinctive yellow singe mark on the back of his neck.

Turns out that his family relied on a portable gas heater and the dog craved the warmth so much that he got too close to the heater and singed his fur. It could have been much worse.

Dogs can also turn over portable heaters accidentally and start fires; if your dog likes to chew, you must keep electrical cords from portable heaters and all appliances out of reach.

Fire screens are a good option for dogs around fireplaces and wood burners; the good thing about these burners is that owners have to regularly add wood – so the dog is moved back on a regular basis. Still, sparks can fly and cause injuries.

Pushka's family have a wood burner (right) and the raised tiles around it are a clear no-go zone for him.

Now that his human brothers are older, a fire screen is not used. Pushka also wears pyjamas on most winter nights.



A good bed goes a long way to protecting dogs from draughts. The beds with higher sides or added 'snuggle sausages' are ideal for this. Raised beds are another option.

I also use draught stoppers under the external doors to my house during winter to help block cold draughts (this technique is also recommended for energy savings).

All dogs (and people) need exercise in winter. Once our skeletal muscles start working, they generate warmth.

It's advisable, though, to start walks slowly to help the dog's muscles warm up and reduce the risk of injury. This is particularly the case with elderly dogs who will need a bit of time to warm up to enable their joints to move freely. 🐾

