



They've been so good all year! Here are a few tips on how to make sure the festive season is filled with fun, not fraught with danger, for the four footed kids in your home....

Top ten tips for a festive season that will keep his tail wagging all the way:

1. *Keep the routine going*

Humans who work hard all year need to wind down at the end of the year, but our pets don't necessarily have the same needs. The change in routine can be unsettling and even distressing for some pets. If your pooch is used to being fed at a specific time each day, try to keep that routine going as far as possible. You can always go back to bed after his breakfast!

2. *Beat the bulge!*

When we are home our pups think it's playtime. The best way to prevent frustration and possible destruction of the house or garden during the holiday season is to make sure that your dogs have some structured activity time every day that you are home. This may take the form of a walk, a training session or simply playing in the garden, Most dogs regard daily attention as the best gift in the world and it gets rid of some of their pent up energy in a way that does not damage your garden or your visiting mother in law's shoes!

3. *Introduce them to your petsitter*

Many people choose to have a friend or neighbour coming round to feed the dogs when they go away for short periods. If you have decided to do this, introduce your dogs to the petsitter before you go away to ensure that they are comfortable with this person coming into the house in your absence. Give the petsitter a few treats to make the time they spend together in your absence a little nicer for the dogs. If the petsitter is willing, ask them to spend half an hour or so playing with the dogs rather than just feeding and leaving every day. This little bit of human contact will make the biggest difference to a lonely dog!

4. *Christmas decorations*

Make sure that your Christmas tree and the decorations on it don't cause chaos for your pets. Place the tree in such a position that all electric cords leading from it are out of the general walking path of your dog. A paw or tail could catch the cords and bring the whole tree crashing down! It is also a good idea to keep shiny or fragile decorations above nose level on the tree. Some dogs may try to snap at the "other dog" whose nose they see in the surface, causing more drama than it's worth. Also remember that dogs love the smell of biscuits. If you have gingerbread decorations, keep the whole tree well out of all dogs' reach!

5. *And about the crackers*

We all love crackers with little goodies inside and most of our dogs don't mind them either! There is an exception though. Dogs that are scared of fireworks or of thunder may also react with fear to the sound of a cracker being pulled. If your dog is very scared of loud noises, rather leave these out of your celebration or use a pair of tweezers to carefully pull the strip of cardboard that causes the crack out of

the cracker before using them. This way, the kids will still get their goodies without the dog having a heart attack!

6. *Coping with the in-laws*

It's hard enough for us, isn't it? Many dogs find it just as hard to have their homes overrun by distant relatives. Make large parties easier for your dog by introducing them to the visitors at a time when the visitors are relatively calm rather than at arrival or during dancing. Give your dog a quiet spot to relax. Ideally this would be a room in the house where visitors are unlikely to go. Place his basket and a bowl of water and maybe a favourite toy there. If your dog is quite a good watchdog, it is safer to keep it away from visitors during braais or outside parties. Dogs are most likely to bite guests as they enter the house to get to the fridge or the bathroom and unless you can always keep an eye on these areas while guests enter them, you could be making things quite hard for your dog!

7. *The packages under the tree*

When wrapping up presents for your pooch, it is always safest to keep them away from the tree until the presentation ceremony. This is especially true if the presents are edible! Also keep edible presents for humans away from the ground, just in case...

8. *What can I buy Fluffy?*

Any toys or treats from your vet or pet store should be good. If you would like to treat your dog, buy a slightly larger version of the chew they are used to rather than switching to another type altogether. Animals have quite sensitive stomachs anyway and already have to cope with unusual food over the festive season. Being exposed to a new chew as well may be too much for them.

9. *Inviting the dog to Christmas dinner*

There is no reason why your furry companion can't share in the festive dinner provided he or she is not allergic to any of the food on offer and is otherwise healthy. Small portions of the starch and the meat, without bones, is a lovely dinner for a pet that will make their day as special as yours. A little fruit salad or custard, provided you haven't pepped it up with a dash of alcohol, makes a splendid doggy dessert.

10. *What not to share*

Always remember that dogs cannot digest the same food we can. Avoid feeding alcohol, excessive amounts of sugar and human chocolate to dogs. Any of these foods can cause serious illness and even death in dogs when consumed in quantities considered normal by human standards. When feeding anything else as a treat over the festive season, remember that moderation is the key to health for our dogs as it is for us!

How to make Christmas Purrfect for her:

1. *The truth about cats and dogs*

In general, cats handle the change of routine and the visitors over the holidays a lot better than dogs, so cat owners have a lot less work to do! If your cat is skittish, however, make sure that he or she has a comfortable room where they can be undisturbed by visitors, especially children.

2. *The Christmas tree*

"Cats aren't clumsy enough to get their tails caught in the electric cords!" I hear cat lovers everywhere shout. This is very true, but the Christmas tree holds a slightly different danger for cats. Be careful not to tie long strings of tinsel around the bottom of the tree so that the cats don't get a paw caught while batting it! If your cat is the type that chews shiny things, rather avoid tinsel altogether.

3. *Wrapping paper*

Cats LOOOVE playing with wrapping paper! Let them, but please don't leave them alone with it. The sellotape and bows tied around the presents can easily be swallowed and could cause serious medical problems for your cat. Take the cat out of the room and close the door if you have to leave while there is

wrapping paper around. Luckily for cat owners, they are far less fussed about the packages than dogs before they are opened.

4. *Christmas dinner for cats*

Cats are generally not as sweet toothed as dogs so it is easier to give them good food for Christmas dinner. The meat, without bones, and some gravy or fat, are lovely healthy treats for cats. Some cats will eat some vegetables too. If they do, you've raised them well!

5. *What not to feed your cat*

Unfortunately, cats get roaringly drunk very easily from brandy butter and beer! Everyone has heard a story about how funny the cat looked when he sat on his own tail after finishing someone else's drink at a family dinner. Although it looks funny, alcohol could kill your cat. Please avoid giving it to them – even in small quantities. We don't want them using up any of their nine lives over the festive season! There's always catnip if you want to give him a lift!