

Deck the halls with Fido

Q *We are so looking forward to celebrating the holidays with all the trimmings, including a decorated Christmas tree. How can we keep our energetic puppy from turning the holidays into the howl-i-days?*

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

YOUR FAST-GROWING PUPPY IS DOWNLOADING ALL THE TIME: sights, sounds, and smells. Enter the holiday season and the normal household routine and décor gets a major makeover that can spike his curiosity. From your pup's perspective, shiny, dangling ornaments, tinsel, a big tree and perhaps, candles and potpourri can be hard to ignore.

Far too many veterinary emergency rooms are filled during the holidays with far-too-many curious pups and dogs who suffer bloody paws from glass ornaments, require surgery to remove ingested tinsel and treatment for severe burns on tongues caused from lapping up hot candle wax or potpourri.

The reality is that we can't stand guard 24-7 in front of the tree and decorations and keep our pups at bay.

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE HOLIDAYS IS TO BRING JOY INTO THE LIVES OF YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

That's why I advise you to consider what I did a couple years ago when I adopted my terrier mix Kona: purposely go low-key this holiday season. That means no big tree, no breakable ornaments and certainly, no real candles or heated potpourri. I still maintained the holiday spirit by placing a small but sturdy tree on my fireplace mantle and battery-operated candles out of paw's reach. I strung holiday cards up high on the living room wall and I filled the house with holiday music.

Wrapped presents were carefully stashed in a bedroom closet with the door closed until Christmas morning. And for your pup's sake, step up the pet proofing in your home. That means installing puppy gates to entries into the kitchen to prevent him from eating holiday chocolates, cookie dough or other dangerous edibles to canines. It also means increased vigilance to prevent him from dashing out the door when holiday guests arrive. Make sure he sports a collar with a visible identification tag with your phone number as well as a microchip.

Finally, I increased purposeful play time and training on young Kona, which turned out to be a benefit for us both. Your playful pup can be a welcomed workout buddy and be a healthy distraction from holiday stress.

The true meaning of the holidays is to bring joy into the lives of your family and friends and to make wonderful memories. By skipping the elaborate décor this season, you will be giving your pup the best gift for this holiday – a safe home. 🐾

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WHETHER YOU ARE ENTERTAINING AT HOME for the holidays or going to visit friends or family ... if you plan to include your dog (and who wouldn't?) you will want to make sure your dog has a fun, safe holiday season. K9s can become anxious or excited in a holiday party atmosphere and, for this reason, need to be monitored. To combat jumping on guests or even knocking over the Christmas tree, the best thing to do is teach a solid "sit" "go to bed" and "stay" or try calmly delivering a favorite toy in your dog's mouth when the doorbell rings to keep greetings mellow!

Get your energetic dog moderately tired before guests arrive with a walk, game of retrieve, or an interactive dog toy, but not so exhausted they are howling for the holidays.

Guests might unknowingly feed your dog toxic foods, overfeed, or even leave the front door open! Make sure your pup wears an ID collar and is micro-chipped in case she slips out the door. Request that guests ask before feeding your dog and offer safe, healthy treats so guests aren't tempted to feed them the wrong food.

Teach your puppy a few tricks to perform for these tasty rewards! I like rewarding my dog for not hanging out under the table or in the kitchen, and instead holding a down/stay at the other end of the room and rewarding them for being calm.

K9 HOLIDAY PARTY TIPS

Deck the halls ... but beware of wires, cords, candles, tinsel, ornaments, and giftwrap. Be sure to secure the Christmas tree and avoid letting your pup pee on or drink water from the tree.

Avoid dangerous holiday delights and decorations including: alcohol, Allspice, chocolate, coffee, currants, grapes, leek, nuts, nutmeg, onions, pumpkin spice, raisins, rhubarb, shallots, yeast dough (raw), and Xylitol (artificial sweetener). Holiday plants such as mistletoe, holly, and poinsettias should also be kept out of reach.

Always have safe place for your dog to go if the party gets too festive or if your pup looks anxious, tired or cranky.

Last but not least, don't forget to have fun! Dogs are very sensitive and in tune with your emotions and, during the holidays, many of us are stressed – our canine companions pick up on that stress. The calmer and happier you are, the calmer and happier your dog will be. Be sure to have fun this holiday season, and your dog will too! 🐾

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