

It's Summertime! Let's Go Swimming!

I know we are all so excited that summer time has finally arrived and many of us will be looking to enjoy some fun around the water with our dogs. Swimming is such a great type of exercise for dogs since it is non-impact, easy on a dog's joints, and often helps them stay cool in the hotter months. Here are some helpful tips and advice for you when you go out for some fun water play with your dogs.



Backyard Play

A baby pool or small animal water trough is a great way to provide some at home water fun for your dog. Some dogs also love running through a sprinkler or chasing water from the water hose. If you are using a pool, remember to place it in a shady spot so that the water stays cool throughout the day. Dogs can easily overheat in a sun heated pool of water, especially if they've been running around chasing ball and are already hot. Change the water in the pool at least once per day to keep it clean. If you have a swimming pool at your

home, be certain that your dog knows how to enter and exit the pool safely on his own in case he falls in or jumps in when you are not watching him. Chlorine treated pools can be okay for dogs to swim in, but watch for eye irritation and skin dryness, as the chlorine can strip the natural oils out of the dog's coat. The chlorinated water is usually okay for your dog to drink. Pools that are purified using salt are safest for your dog. If your pool has a concrete deck, check your dog's paws regularly for signs of wearing or tearing on the pads which can be very painful.

Ponds & Streams

Fresh water swimming is usually easiest on your dogs skin and coat, and it is generally okay for your dog to also drink the water while he swims. Use caution when evaluating still waters, like ponds, for your dog to swim in. Some still waters can contain harmful protozoa that can cause intestinal problems; or bacterium, such as the type that causes leptospirosis. It may be a good idea to speak with your vet about where you will be swimming your dogs as your vet may recommend that your dog be vaccinated against leptospirosis. You should be very familiar with the bottom surface of the water where your dog will swim. Glass and other refuse on the bottom surface can cut your dog. Watch for old tangles of string, rope, fishing line, or fish hooks near or below the surface that your dog can become entangled in while swimming. Watch out for snakes around the water and also alligator snapping turtles which can be very dangerous to dogs. After swimming; do a head to tail inspection on your dog. Look for any cuts or scrapes and look out for leeches after any fresh water swims.

Rivers & Lakes

I recommend life jackets for dogs swimming in big open water for a couple of reasons. First, a dog who really loves to swim can become physically fatigued before his desire to swim runs out. Second, there is always a danger in open water that someone driving a motorized vehicle, like a boat or Jet Ski, may not notice your dog swimming. I like neon colored life vests for this reason. The life vest makes the dog visible and also allows him to rest in the water when he gets tired without the risk of drowning. Life



vests also make it easier and safer to pluck a tired or panicky dog up out of the water. I always use life vests on novice swimmers. Be careful of strong currents in rivers. Strong currents and fast running water will tire your dog quicker. Have an emergency plan in place for rescuing a dog that has become caught in a current and is drifting down river. Some dogs love to leap or dive into water. Be aware of large rocks or other large debris under that surface of the water that a dog could accidentally land on while leaping or diving.

Docks, Marinas, Beaches, and Landings

Be certain to closely supervise your dog in these areas. Trash and debris are prevalent in these areas as well as bait, fishhooks, and other tackle. Dead fish washed up on shores can make your dog sick if he ingests them. Fish bones can cause punctures within your dog's throat and digestive system. Dead fish can make for an awfully stinky outing if your dog decides to take a roll on them. Bring along some dog shampoo just in case. Beware of the footing on docks, decks, and piers. Watch for protruding nails and splinters. Docks, decks, piers, and sandy beaches also become very hot for your dog to walk on. If you cannot walk on these surfaces comfortably without shoes, know that these surfaces are also uncomfortable for your dog. Wet surfaces can become very slippery and dangerous for dogs, making it easier for them to slide and accidentally fall into the water. Provide good footing for your dog if possible. A dog can become injured while trying to negotiate these slick surfaces. Watch out for limping, reluctance to walk on the surface, and any signs of soreness. Remember to provide shade and fresh water for your dog when you are out boating or near the water. Dogs with short fur and white or light pigmented skin can be at risk for sunburn. I recommend a sunscreen for dogs applied to areas that will be sensitive to sunburn. I use a type of sunscreen that is waterproof and safe for babies.

Ocean Swimming

The big caution to ocean swimming that many people do not know is that ingesting ocean water can cause your dog nausea and diarrhea. I'm not talking just a little diarrhea either, I am talking really big yucky diarrhea. The kind you do not want to be dealing with while traveling, in hotels, condos, RV's, or beach rentals. Do your best in not allowing your dog to drink the ocean water. With my dogs, I avoid playing a lot of fetch in ocean water, because dogs can't avoid swallowing some water when they are retrieving and swimming with objects in their mouths. Be cautious about what is in the water where your dog is swimming. Jelly fish float in on some beaches in large numbers at certain times of the year.

Be aware of oyster beds, barnacles, corals, and other bottom surface risks that could injure your dog's legs and feet. Rip tides in the deeper surf area of the beach can also be dangerous for your dog. I recommend that you allow your dog to play in the surf at beaches, but discourage allowing your dog to swim out over his head. Always shampoo your dog and rinse well after a trip to ocean water. In some waters, there are organisms that can affect your dog's skin, and sand can cause chafing and abrasions when not rinsed thoroughly out of the coat and off of the foot pads. Be sure to check the pads of the paws for sand burs and thorns that come off of vegetation that grows in beach areas. Ocean



water can ruin the metal parts on dog collars so you may want to replace your dog's good looking vacation collar with a beach collar that you don't mind tossing after the trip.

I do not recommend allowing your dog to swim in inland coastal areas. Marshes are risky because of the presence of oyster beds, poisonous water snakes, and alligators. Dogs can also become stuck in the pluff mud that makes up the surface of most marshes and brackish water tidal inlets.

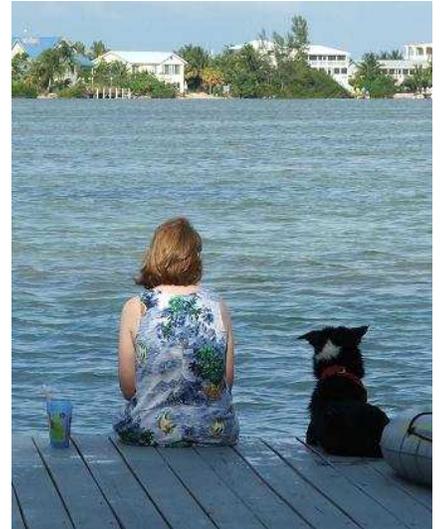


Teaching a Dog to Swim

While some dogs are natural swimmers, others are not so fond of the water. I have seen a number of dogs, with time and patience, who have learned to swim and eventually come to love the water. I start teaching swimming to these dogs by standing in waist-deep water, having someone hand me the life-jacketed dog down into the water, and guiding the dog by holding the life jacket and helping the dog move

forward through the water. Never throw, or push your dog into water. A novice swimmer will usually flail and flap his front legs up out of the water, which causes his head to sink into the water. Once the dog figures out that he can swim if he leaves his front legs under the water, he is usually okay. Be careful in teaching these swimming lessons. A novice dog will try to climb on top of another swimmer or even another swimming dog in order to try to get up out of the water, creating a great risk of drowning. This is why I like to have control of the dog by holding his life jacket, and teaching swimming lessons in water that is shallow enough for me to touch the bottom.

Have a great summer and enjoy some safe water time with your dog!



GEORGIA DOG GYM TRAINING CLASS SCHEDULE

Next Basic Training Class begins:

Tuesday, June 22, 2010 at 7pm

Wednesdays at 6:30pm- Advanced/Sequencing Agility Class

Thursdays at 6:30pm- Beginner Agility Class

Fridays at 7pm- Drop-in Rally Obedience Training Run Throughs

New Resource for Pet Food Information:

www.thetruthaboutpetfood.com

Find out about the most recent recalls, pet food ratings & reviews, pet food ingredient warnings, as well as news about dog food manufacturers.