

## Winterizing your pet

Last winter North Carolina experienced brutally low temperatures for days on end. We experienced record cold. In comparison, even colder than the state of Alaska. The Chatham Animal Services Director told me there were several weeks last winter when they were overwhelmed with reports of pets with no shelter. So many, Animal Services Officers were only responding to those calls. I have no idea what this coming winter has in store, but I'd like to take this opportunity to provide information that may help prevent unnecessary discomfort and potential death for our four-legged companions.

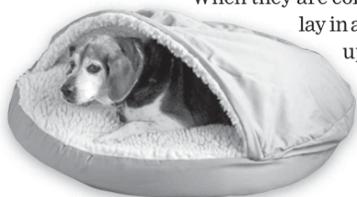
Some people have the misconception that dogs and cats have some kind of mystical ability to keep cool in the summer and warm in the winter. There are some physiological things their bodies are able to do to keep comfortable to a degree, but in extreme conditions they are

vulnerable to the elements, like humans. Just because pets survive the winter, doesn't mean they weren't cold and miserable. Since dogs and cats are domesticated animals, many have been genetically modified in ways that prevent them from tolerating cold temperatures very well.

What temperature is too cold for a dog? That will depend on the breed and age. Double-coated arctic breeds may love the cold and are thrilled to see snow. Shorthaired and warm climate breeds don't handle cold as well. There are a lot of Hounds and Pit Bull dogs living outdoors in Chatham County. They get cold easy because they typically have very little insulating body fat and fur. Small dogs get cold quicker than larger ones. Very young and very old animals have a harder time regulating their body temperature and are at greater risk in cold weather, even if they are northern breeds.

When dogs are hot, they pant and lay stretched out in an effort to release body heat.

When they are cold, they lay in a curled up position with their noses



tucked in between their legs and stomach, trying to be compact and conserve body heat. If your dog, or any animal, is shivering you need to intervene and provide them with warmth. Shivering is an indication they are cold beyond what their body can do to keep warm. If they don't find a heat source they are at risk of hypothermia. Everyone who has outdoor only animals should have a plan for extreme weather conditions. If there is never a temperature low enough to justify bringing a pet in from the elements, then for their own health and safety perhaps they would be better off with someone else.

Due to the dry air in the winter months, animals are at high risk of dehydration. Water can begin to freeze in minutes when the mercury falls below 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, water bowls for outdoor pets should be checked and replenished several times a day. Animals also burn more calories trying to keep warm, so on colder days their meals need to be larger.

Doghouses should be big enough to lie in comfortably, but not so large they can't hold the dog's body heat. Doors should face east or south, since the coldest winds blow from the north and west. Inside the doghouse, straw, hay, or wood shavings are the best options for comfort and warmth. Blankets are not a good choice since they get wet and freeze. Chatham County's Animal Ordinance requires doghouses have a roof, floor, and at least three solid sides. Don't forget to provide shelter for outdoor cats, too. Many cats are injured or killed after climbing into warm car engines trying to escape the cold.

The Dogs Off Chains coalition is a wonderful group of volunteers who build pens for dogs in Chatham County who have only known life on the end of a chain. This time of year they also provide doghouses and straw for many outdoor dogs in need. Donations can be made through their website at [www.dogsoffchains.org](http://www.dogsoffchains.org), or mailed to: Dogs Off Chains; PO Box 157, Pittsboro, NC 27312

Let's all have a warm, safe, and happy winter this year!

Valerie Broadway, the Canine Coach, is a dog trainer and behavioral specialist. For information: 919.542.4726 or [www.caninecoachingservices.com](http://www.caninecoachingservices.com).

## Winter's onset and the connections we share

Mod, wet leaves, mole trails, serious scampering squirrels and frost on the horizon all mean that winter is knocking at the door. My garden got weeded thoroughly many times throughout the year, but warm November days mixed in with a deluge of rain woke up my good friend "chick weed". I have a weed weasel and will hit the high spots soon. Then I will continue on with my spot mulching. Making sure that the worst weed areas are covered. I will throw Plantone as I go, so that plants can keep growing their roots deeper and deeper.

Climate change has made gardening in N.C. even more challenging than ever before. The bird patterns change, clematis questioningly



bloom and my puppies don't know whether to sprint around after the deer on the other side of the fence or to just 'huddle tight' inside near the soon to be lit wood stove.

I have resisted cutting perennials back until we get a good hard frost and cold weather really moves in. I am finally planning to get my bulbs in which is always a sign of hopefulness that spring will come around another year. The bird feeder is filled for our sweet darlings who really are just the best natural show in existence.

Camellias continue to bring me pure joy. I have been floating them in a low rectangular

pottery vessel just like my Mom did for all the years I can remember. Just the musty smell of them; set in mass, bring me back. I see my Mom carefully cutting the blossoms, placing them in a large flat bottom basket so as not to bruise them, cutting the stems very close and then carefully arranging them in this low vase. I just thought of how this one moment ties her to my daughters' quilting. Placing the right colors carefully side-by-side to make the whole beautiful.

There is connection everywhere we turn. Love of birds, the smell of the camellias, the feel of soil (dirt) as I dig to plant my bulbs, careful plant feeding as I work my way through the garden... these are moments of my history and that of my Nannie Shorpe and Mother. I will have my niece and her new husband spending time with me at Blue Moon. And like the women

before me, I will lovingly put flowers from the garden in their bedroom and bathroom. I have brought in dried okra and stuffed them in a hanging basket. Soon Nandina berries will come inside. Bringing outside in gives me such pleasure. Sharing it really makes family arriving a joyful occasion.

Keep noticing the connection. When you feel like there is just nothing in the garden, walk mindfully around and notice the detail of every area. There are always unexpected treasures just waiting to be discovered. Take the time to remember the connections in your life because they form your infinity scarf. We are all sharing this exquisite planet.

Ginny Gregory is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. She is the owner and creative energy behind Beyond The Pail... Creating Gardens and Beyond

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