

"DOG DAYS OF SUMMER" June 2021

Here we are heading into the "**Dog Days of Summer**". The official Dog Days of Summer are July 3 to August 11. But what does that mean? It doesn't really have to do with dogs lying around panting in the summer heat. The phrase comes from ancient Greek beliefs about a star. Originally, the phrase actually had nothing to do with dogs, or even with the lazy days of summer. Instead, it turns out, the dog days refer to the dog star, Sirius, and its position in the heavens. To the Greeks and Romans, the "dog days" occurred around the day when Sirius appeared to rise just before the sun, in late July. They referred to these days as the hottest time of the year, a period that could bring fever, or even catastrophe. Today we use the phrase to mean something like "It's so hot the dogs lie around panting."

So after this fun little story of origin I want to make an important point that is relevant to every day life for the animals and humans. Humans can surely get overheated which can be extremely dangerous. However, we have a better shot at surviving these hot days than our animal friends do. We do not have fur coats and we are able to perspire which cools us off to some extent. Humans and horses are the only species that perspire. However, we can get overheated, as well.

We have all experienced finding a dog in a hot car and having that panicked feeling of "if I don't get this dog out of this car now it is going to die" By contrast the very person that leaves the dog in the car immediately turns on the engine and the air conditioner when they enter the car. Try this experiment. On a hot day, get in your car and sit there until you begin to get suffocatingly hot. I guarantee in less than two minutes you will surrender to the air conditioning being turned on.

Here's another experiment. Sit in the back of a pick-up on the metal bed out in broad sunlight with no shade. You will be burning hot in a couple of minutes. Yet I see dogs riding around in the back of pick-ups on metal beds with no shade. You may justify by thinking as you race down the road at 60 mph the wind blows and your dog will be cool. Try blasting yourself in the face with your hair drier turned up to high while you sit in a metal bed pick-up and see how you cool you feel.

Please do not put your dog in a kennel in the truck bed, on a hot day. Your dog will quickly get miserably and dangerously hot in there with the sun

beating down on the roof of the kennel. The test is "How hot would you get? Your dog who has a fur coat and doesn't perspire will get even hotter.

Many animals only have their tongue to release heat. When your pet is getting too hot the tongue will get very red and expand in size. The harder the dog is panting the hotter it is. Cats are the same way. They cool through their tongue. Also the ground, especially asphalt can easily get too hot for your pets' feet. I see dogs out for a walk when the pavement is way too hot and the sun is way too hot. Please don't do that. Here's a test you can use to test the pavement heat. Take the back of your hand and lay it on the pavement, if it is too hot within 5 seconds it is way too hot for your pet's feet. Pet's can also burn their feet on artificial grass, which is becoming more common.

During the hottest part of the day do not over exercise your dog. Many dogs want to chase their ball no matter how hot it is, but you need to carefully monitor what's going on with your dog. If you want to play ball with your dog, 6 am and 8pm are good times, but still even then short periods of time are preferred.

Farm animals also need to stay as cool as possible in the summer. Plenty of water and shade and limited movement are the best measures for keeping them safe. Do not vaccinate on really hot days. That is an additional stressor that your animal does not need. Sprinklers can be used to keep many animals cool.

Humans and horses are about the only species that sweat profusely. Of course that does not mean that those species cannot get overheated too. If you are in the presence of someone over heated, keep them still, provide water, put a cool towel on them (never use really cold water) it will send the animal into shock. If the animal is in serious distress get it to a veterinarian as soon as possible.

The best advice - If you are hot and miserable so are your animals. Provide the cooling remedies to them you would provide yourself - plenty of water, shade, fans, air conditioning and limited movement.

I cannot emphasize enough how careful you need to be on these hot days with your pets, your children and yourself. Heat stroke is no joke! It is a very serious situation. Take the necessary precautions, stay safe and have a great summer.

Cheryl Wicks is the Co-Founder and President of Sammie's Friends