



# The Water's lovely!

Have a pool? Why not invite your pooch to enjoy the water with you? Swimming is great fun and exercise for dogs, as long as you keep their safety in mind.

BY SARA JACKSON

On warm summer days, there's no better way to cool off than jumping into a sparkling swimming pool. It's even better when you can share the fun with your canine companion. Swimming is excellent exercise for dogs, and many love diving after floating toys or taking part in water races with people or other canines.

"Dogs of all shapes, sizes, breeds and ages can enjoy the fun and health benefits that swimming offers," says Alex Graham, RVT, who runs the Hydrotherapy Program at Forever Friends Pet Care Center and Hospital in Grafton, Ohio. "Swimming can be very beneficial to an older dog that suffers from arthritis, hip dysplasia and other joint conditions."

## Start slowly

Take your time introducing your dog to the swimming pool, and keep water safety in mind, just as you would

with children. If your dog has never been in the pool before, do not throw or push him into the water. It could cause him to panic, or traumatize him to the point where he'll refuse to go near water again. Make your dog's first introduction to the pool a pleasant, non-threatening one.

"Puppies can be introduced to the water starting between four to six months," says Alex. "The sooner you expose your dog to the water, the sooner he will become comfortable in the pool."

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To help him learn how to swim properly, hold up his hind end so he will begin treading water with all four legs.

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Before beginning swimming lessons, Alex adds, it is a good idea to have your dog checked out by a veterinarian to make sure he has no underlying health concerns that should keep him out of the water.

The best way to introduce your dog to the pool is to place him on the top step so he can get used to the water around his legs. Gradually coax him into the pool, either with a treat or a gentle tug on the leash. If your dog is a little guy, try carrying him slowly into the pool with you, stopping frequently to let him get used to his watery surroundings.

### Doggy paddle

Once you feel your dog is fully comfortable with being in the water, let him swim short distances to the steps, gradually increasing the distance each time.

Just don't assume your dog will instinctively know how to swim. What he will know how to do is doggy paddle, but this can very easily tire him out and lead to a dangerous situation if he is not near an exit.

To help him learn how to swim properly, hold up his hind end so he will begin treading water with all four legs. Swimming lessons should not last any longer than ten or 15 minutes, and each session should end with lots of praise and treats.

### Swim safely

• Just as you would with a child, keep a close eye on your dog when he's in the pool. Unless he's a seasoned water baby, consider having him wear a life vest. "Dogs with shorter legs can have a more difficult time keeping their balance in the water, so it is extra important for these breeds to wear a life vest and always be closely monitored," says Alex.



The author's dog demonstrates her swimming form.

• Even physically fit dogs can overexert themselves and become fatigued. If the dog's rear end drops lower in the water, this means that he is growing too tired to swim and needs to be called out of the water.

• The old adage about waiting an hour after you eat before going in the water also holds true for your furry swim buddy. Never let him in the pool right after a big meal.

• With all that swimming and playing, your pooch is bound to work up a mighty thirst and will naturally turn to the

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biggest bowl (i.e. the pool) to hydrate himself. Don't let him – pool water has been treated with chlorine and other chemicals that can make him sick. "It may cause the dog to vomit water after swimming," says Alex. "If you are concerned that your dog has taken in too much water or he is vomiting, has diarrhea, trouble breathing or coughing, notify your veterinarian immediately." Always keep a supply of pure drinking water available near the pool.

- Put up a fence around the pool's perimeter with a gate that automatically shuts. This will prevent your dog from deciding to take a solitary dip when he's out for a potty break and you're in the house. For an added security measure, you can place alarms around the pool perimeter that will sound when your dog passes by.
- Make sure your pool has steps, a ramp or ladder and that your dog knows how to use them to safely exit the water should he fall in by accident.

Once your pool pooch becomes a confident swimmer and you've factored in safety, there's no end to the amount of summer fun you can both have! 🐾

A life vest is a good idea if he's not used to swimming much.

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