

Hot Dogs in the City

Helping pets enjoy your urban lifestyle

BY TANA WEINGARTNER

Now that the proverbial dog days of summer are upon us, it's only fitting that we discuss man's best friend. Dogs are a great source of joy and companionship, but if you live in an urban environment there are a few issues you should consider to ensure Fido is comfortable, safe and healthy.

Sit. Stay. Good dog.

Suburban and country dogs can get away with being rambunctious, but city dogs have to play by a different set of rules. Stephanie and Mic Foster opened the Pet Athletic Club (818 Reedy St., Downtown) in 2006. They specialize in helping city dwellers acclimate their pets to city living.

"Dogs that live in an urban environment have to be a lot more calm," Stephanie says.

Heavy traffic, excessive noise and unexpected surprises like horse-drawn carriages are all possible threats that can spook or upset your pet. Foster believes it's important that a downtown doggie has a cool disposition and can "roll with the punches."

"They have to be a lot more aware of their surroundings and their space," she says, adding that this might require some extra training.

Consult with your veterinarian or trainer for specific methods. If adopting or buying, consider whether the dog is predisposed to be high-strung or more easy-going.

A key command all downtown dogs must learn is some form of "Leave it."

"I actually think it's the most important thing you should teach your dog," Mic Foster says.

Downtown sidewalks can be a smorgasbord of cigarette butts, wrappers, food scraps and all kinds of trash. Some items could be poisonous or cause your pet to become ill. Ensure that your pet understands and complies when told not to pick up or eat things off the street.

"Chicken wing bones are all over and can be really bad for your dog," Mic says.

Dogs (city or otherwise) shouldn't be given cooked bones as they are choking hazards and can splinter into dangerous shards.

A barking dog can drive your neighbors (and you) nuts. Apartment or condo living offers plenty of distractions that could potentially send your pooch into a barking frenzy.

Dogs have superb hearing. Couple that with thin walls and lots of people coming and going and you could end up with a manic mutt. The Fosters say this behavior can likely be corrected or alleviated with training.

Leash up!

When it comes to green space, Cincinnati is full of hidden gems. You might have to walk a little further to find a grassy patch, but the extra effort is good for you and your pet. Sawyer Point, for instance, is a great place to take your dog for a run or to play fetch.

Be a good neighbor. Take baggies or a "pooper scooper" with you to clean up after your pet. Some popular dog walking spots stock "pet mitts" for precisely this purpose, so there's no excuse for leaving behind unwanted presents.

If your dog isn't used to living in a concrete jungle, Mic Foster says it might take some additional training to help your pet become comfortable with eliminating on hard surfaces.

Keep in mind that while you may enjoy a "hug" from your puppy, not everyone feels the same way.

"In an urban environment you run into so many people in so many different scenarios," Stephanie Foster says. "You run into business people who

ment, they're in their working environment and so a dog really has to be a lot more well-mannered."

Places to go, things to sniff

Plans are in the works for two puppy playgrounds in the downtown area, says Casey Gilmore, vice president of the Downtown Residents Council. The group is planning to build a dog park on Eggleston near Sawyer Point.

"Currently we're just trying to raise the funds for it," she says, "so if we do raise the funds, it will definitely happen."

The Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC) also is sniffing around with the idea of building a dog park. The group's Washington Park extension plan calls for two pup-centric spaces.

In the meantime, here are some other options: Wiggly Field at Voice of America Park in West Chester is a bit of hike from downtown, but it offers a ton of space for romping, rolling and running. Otto Armleder Memorial Park on Wooster Pike north of the Beechmont levy is closer to town and is scenically situated along the Little Miami River.

The dog park at Mt. Airy Forest (on Westwood Northern Boulevard between Montana Avenue and North Bend Road) might be smaller than the others, but its lofty hilltop location usually means dry paws post-romp. Water pumps and buckets are also available here to keep pooches well hydrated.

A few reminders about dog park etiquette: Clean up after your pet, make sure your pet isn't getting too aggressive with other dogs and read and abide by the posted rules.

Daycare: Not just for kids

Right now there aren't many, if any, veterinary options downtown. That could be changing, according to Gilmore.

"The zoning was just changed for the building on the corner of Perry and Plum Streets to bring in a multi-level vet clinic," she says.

Until then, the best way to find a good veterinarian is to talk with your neighbors and see what they recommend.

If being left behind when you head to work makes your dog stressed or depressed, consider doggie day-care. My Old English Sheepdog, Rogue, enjoyed her tour of the Pet

Athletic Club and has been pawing at the door to go back. The Fosters have loads of experience with dog care and training and offer daytime activities such as baseball, soccer and Frisbee.

Their training staff can work with your dog in realistic home settings to improve certain behaviors like staying off the furniture. Best of all, a mandatory nap time in the early afternoon helps rejuvenate your animal so he/she isn't too tired for evening activities with you.

A little further from downtown, The Pet Spot (2503 Norwood Ave, Norwood) offers training, boarding and daycare. Both facilities offer grooming and webcams.

Jeff Voelpel, co-owner of The Pet Spot, agrees that city dogs must be well trained so they'll get along with other dogs and not annoy neighbors. He says all dogs are different and poor behaviors can be set off by a multitude of factors.

"It's a brand new dog once you figure out how to address what triggers a poor behavior," he says.

Voelpel employs two professional trainers who have proven experience working with animals that are deemed unsuitable for doggie daycare because of aggressiveness.

The Pet Spot also offers long-term boarding, which can be a lifesaver following major life changes or if you're new to Cincinnati.

"We've had some dogs here for up to a year," Voelpel says. "You know, if their owner's home burns down or if the owner is living in a corporate apartment that doesn't allow dogs, it's a great option."

Go fetch

The "green" movement is in full swing, and there's no reason your four-legged companion should have to miss out. The area's favorite green general store, Park + Vine (1109 Vine St, Over-the-Rhine) offers a selection of environmentally friendly toys and products.

The aptly named Earthdog line includes hemp leashes, collars, bedding and dog toys. Herbal dog shampoos and flea collars will leave coats soft, shiny and pest free without harmful chemicals.

Cleaning up after your pet might seem a little less icky when using BioBag Dog Waste Bags. These 100 percent biodegradable poop bags can even go straight into your compost. ©



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