

WHAT TO WEAR

Choosing the RIGHT BOOTS for your dog

BY SANDRA MURPHY

Dog boots are a wonderful invention, and can protect your pooch's paws from hot asphalt, icy snow, and everything in between. Here's what to keep in mind when shopping.

We always have footwear on when walking with our dogs. So it can be easy to forget that our canines' feet are exposed to temperatures and terrains that can be uncomfortable for them. Burning hot asphalt, bitterly cold snow, road salt, sharp gravel, or splintering ice can all pose problems. Protecting his feet with a set of dog boots helps prevent discomfort and injury, and makes your outings together a lot more enjoyable. Choosing the right type of dog boot for the situation is important, and that's what this article is about.

FOR SUMMER STROLLS

Boots for warm weather walking should protect your dog's paws from hot asphalt or beach sand, but also be lightweight and breathable. Poochy Pawz City Shoes are a great example — they're made with a Lycra-blend fabric for stretch, shape retention, and moisture wicking (www.poochypawz.com).

Important info: In warmer weather, even if the ambient temperature is a moderate 77°F, asphalt can be as hot as 125°F — enough to burn paws.

WINTER WARMTH

When the weather turns cold and the snow starts to fly, your dog needs a different kind of boot. Dogs are susceptible to frostbite in as few as 30 minutes after the temperature drops below freezing. Unprotected feet (as well as the nose, ears, and tail) experience the greatest exposure to freezing temperatures.



Important info: Depending on your dog's hair type, ice and snow can accumulate between his toes, causing discomfort and increasing the risk of frostbite.

Look for a boot that's waterproof, windproof, and that has a breathable upper to help retain warmth. It's also a good idea to opt for a style that has a good tread on the bottom, for traction in slippery conditions. Some boots include a sock-like gaiter that pulls up over the top of the boot and zips in place, to protect against deeper snow. Additional features to look for are secure fastenings (important for any dog boot!) and reflective strips for nighttime walking during the shorter days of winter.

RAINY DAYS

Most dogs love splashing through puddles, but it means a lot of clean-up when you get back home, especially if it's muddy. A water-resistant boot that's also lightweight and easy to keep clean is a good choice for those rainy days. Look for a style that conforms to the dog's paw shape for a Spandex-like fit.




FOR ROUGH TERRAIN


Depending on where you live and walk with your dog, you may encounter a variety of different terrain types (and trash) that could injure his tender pads. Gravel or stones, broken glass or shells, burrs, and cactus needles are just some examples. In these situations, the best choice is a durable all-weather boot with good soles that are resistant to being penetrated by sharp objects.


Important info: All dog boots should fit well and securely, and not slide around the dog's foot.


In the end, some trial and error, along with lots of patience and treats, will result in the right boot for your dog — and for the season.


ADDITIONAL TIPS AND FEATURES

 Some dog boots are only ankle height, while others are taller. Shorter boots are fine for mown grass and clement conditions, while a higher boot can be a better choice for tall grass or deep snow.


 Dogs don't perspire like we do, although they do sweat through their paw pads. So it's important to choose dog boots that wick out moisture to prevent overheating and fungal infections, especially in warm weather.

 Dog trainer Julia Jenkins says that summer boots should have a rubber sole that offers protection from the heat. For winter, look for a waterproof outer shell, an inner insulation layer, and a higher traction sole.

 It's vital that you get the right size of boots for your dog. Most companies will provide advice on how to measure his feet for the best fit.

 Dog boots should be snug but not tight — allow room for one finger to fit between his foot/leg and the boot.

Important info: Look for easy on, easy off. Be aware that some dogs won't like the sound of Velcro-like straps opening.

 "Stitched seams are more durable and long-lasting than glued seams, as well as being more comfortable for your dog," Julia says. "Multiple straps make boots more secure and less likely to fall off."

GETTING HIM USED TO BOOTS

While your dog may love chewing your new shoes, getting him to wear his own is a whole different concept. It's best to try one boot to start with, then add another as he gets used to the idea. Hand out treats and try not to laugh. Dogs often forget how to walk, or look like they're doing the Hokey Pokey during the first few try-ons. Be patient and persistent, and eventually, he'll get used to wearing them.