

PET TALES

A fear-free Fourth

BY DR. MARTY BECKER & GINA SPADAFORI
Universal Press Syndicate

The Fourth of July is the ultimate summer holiday, a celebration not only of America's history and traditions, but also of family, food and fireworks fun.

But while we may love our pyrotechnics, pet lovers always need to remember our midsummer spectacular is no holiday for many of our animal companions.

While we humans are oohing and aahing, too often our pets are frightened out of their wits. They'll spend the holiday under the bed (or in the basement) cowering, shaking, drooling, and seeking safety and comfort. Scared pets have been known to jump out of apartment windows, leap over or dig under fences, or chew their skin until it's raw. They may also bolt out an open door to become lost but never found.

With the holiday at hand, make plans to ease the stress on your pet.

First, here's what you should not do — reward your pet for being scared. Comforting scared pets may seem the right thing to do, but it sends the wrong message. If you remain calm and don't baby scared pets, they'll be closer to learning how to handle loud noises.

The best defense against Fourth of July problems is a good offense. Professional trainers and behaviorists start socializing dogs and making every potentially negative experience — such as fireworks and thunderstorms — into something rewarding. If a negative experience

comes with tasty treats, then your pet is going to at least tolerate it, if not welcome it. This works best when started as a puppy, but don't give up hope if your dog is already an adult: New behaviors can be learned.

One way to help your pet is to expose him or her to commercial recordings of thunderstorms or fireworks, and play them at increasing volume. Play the recordings at a low volume — recognizing how acute a pet's hearing is — and give praise and treats. It's a party! As the volume and duration are increased during subsequent sessions, give them really tasty treats so they have the expectation of a repeat treat. Initially, play the recording for five minutes, eventually leaving it on during daily activities as "normal" background noise.

That's not going to happen with just a few days to plan, so make a note for next year, and get ready to cope with this year's racket.

Provide pets with safe, secure hiding spaces inside your home. Dogs and cats who are comfortable in crates can find them a good place to ride out the noise, especially if the crate is put in a quiet, darkened part of the house. Whatever



Some pets aren't bothered by holiday festivities, but others need to be protected.

you do, don't just throw your pet outside. A terrified pet can find a way out of the yard and, once out, will just keep running. The Fourth is a sadly busy time for emergency veterinary clinics, with a steady stream of pets hit by cars, and for animal control facilities dealing with an influx of lost pets.

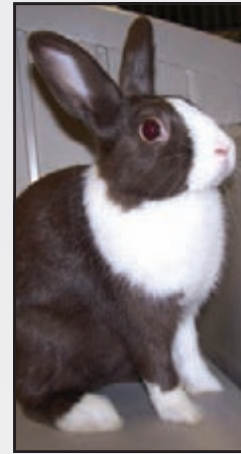
If you know your pet becomes totally unhinged by fireworks noise, talk to your veterinarian before the holiday about an appropriate medication to calm your pet. Make sure you understand the dose and how long before the evening falls to give the medication. You might also ask to learn some acupressure points that will help to calm your pet.

This Independence Day, while we enjoy our parades, picnics and fireworks, don't forget your pet: He's counting on you! ■

Pets of the Week



>>Venus I'm a 1-year-old Siamese mix (#443467). I have been at the shelter for over a month. I sure wish someone would see what a wonderful kitty I am. June is Adopt-A-Shelter-Cat Month... take me home for free with an approved application. Kittens are \$25.



>>Brownie (#444188) Are you in the market for a different kind of pet? I'm a Dutch Rabbit with very striking markings. I don't need to be walked, but I do need exercise and playtime. I am already litter trained. Are you a vegetarian? I am, too! Come visit me at the shelter and see how many other things we have in common. I might just be the right pet for you. My adoption fee is \$10.

To adopt or foster a pet

There are many dogs and cats available at the Lee County Animal Services shelter at 5600 Banner Drive, Fort Myers. Call 533-7387 (LEE-PETS) or visit www.leelostpets.com. Adoption applications may be downloaded or completed at the shelter, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Please use the animal's ID number when inquiring about it. Adoption fees for dogs are \$25-\$95. Cats are \$25-\$75. Adoptions include sterilization, vaccinations, and license if at least 3 months old, flea treatment, a 10-day health guarantee and more. Loving foster homes are needed too. Go online and click on "Foster Homes." Those interested in helping to purchase Kuranda dog beds, which help make dogs more comfortable at the shelter, should visit the Web site.

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