

Enjoying The Great Outdoors With Your Dog

Smart preparation keeps camping with dogs relaxed.

Jean M. Fogle

"My husband Paul and I are Type-A personalities," admits Liz Palika of Oceanside, Calif. "To get away, we load our three Australian Shepherds in the van and go camping. Surrounded by huge Douglas firs with a burbling creek nearby, we are in heaven. The dogs get to explore and smell all kinds of new things they don't encounter at home, and I enjoy watching their reactions," she says.

Another canine camping fan, Robert Armstrong Texas resident, says, "When Charlie, our 12-year-old Yorkshire Terrier, hears the RV rumbling down the street and can see it from the couch by the front window, he lets everyone in the neighborhood know that it's camping time."

Whether you like pitching a tent under the stars or parking your RV in a campground, including your dog doubles the fun.

To ensure the experience is fun for all, be prepared: Confirm that the campground accepts dogs. Policies can change from year to year. Due to insurance concerns, some campgrounds do not allow certain breeds.

If your dog has never camped, set up your tent a few days ahead in your yard, so she can get used to it.

Pack your dog's rabies certificate. Many campgrounds and parks require proof of vaccination.

Help ensure your dog's safety with up-to-date ID tags that include your cell phone number.

Carry a current picture of your dog. If she gets lost, you'll need a photo to put up posters or talk to people in the area.

Check the weather report, but plan for weather changes. "Savanna, our Greyhound, nearly froze to death when we went camping in late September in Big Bear," says Kim Thornton of Lake Forest, Calif. "My husband Jerry had an old sweatshirt, so we cut the arms off and put it on her."

Make sure parasite preventives are up-to-date.

Once you've set up camp, familiarize yourself with the rules. "We scrupulously obey all leash laws because we don't want to be the reason dogs can no longer stay in our favorite campgrounds," Palika says.

Poop pickup is important. "We pack a good stock of the narrow plastic bags that our newspaper comes in," Armstrong says. Quiet hours are usually from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m., and most campers don't appreciate barking dogs.

Most of all, be considerate of others and respect their rights. "We go overboard to be good neighbors and campers, and wish all dogs owners felt the same way," Palika says.

Like a good scout, be prepared, follow the rules, and have a safe and fun camping experience!