

PETS & POOLS

**Making Your Swimming Pool
a Pet Friendly Environment**



Many pets enjoy the water as much as their owners do, and many families that have pets want to share their love for the water with their furry friends. It's unwise to just let a dog or other pet jump into a backyard pool, though. They could damage the pool, injure someone or even endanger themselves. If you have a pool or are thinking about building one in your backyard, make sure everyone in your family -- including Fido or any other water-loving animals -- can enjoy your new backyard oasis safely. Here are some things you'll want to consider, covering everything from pre-build features to fun games you can play together.



Before You Build: Choosing Materials and Equipment

Fiberglass pools withstand scratches from pets' paws

Selecting the right type of pool is always important, but it's especially so if animals will be using the pool. There are three kinds of inground pools, but only one that's well suited for pets:

- ✗ Vinyl pools have liners that are easily torn by pets' claws
- ✗ Gunite pools can be harsh on pets' joints, paws and nails
- ✓ Fiberglass pools will withstand wear and tear caused by pets and not hurt them

Of these three, vinyl pools will prove the most costly to own -- even if they're not the most expensive to install. Every rip in the liner caused by your pet will need to be repaired, and the liner will need to be replaced after a few significant scratches. Replacing a vinyl liner can cost \$1,000 or more. Simply put, vinyl pools are not made to withstand the wear and tear of a pet with claws.

Gunite (or concrete) pools, in contrast, can withstand scratches however, Concrete is an unyielding material that can be hard on older pet's joints as they're getting in and out. Additionally, concrete can harm pets' pads and nails if it's not smoothed over with a coating, or if its coating wears off.

Fiberglass pools are best suited for pets, because they don't have the disadvantages that vinyl and gunite pools present. Fiberglass is a durable material, not a simple liner or coating, so it can withstand sharp nails. At the same time, it's more forgiving than concrete (which is why fiberglass pools don't crack when soil shifts, while concrete ones may). It's give might be imperceptible to your eyes, but an older pet's joints will notice the difference. Finally, fiberglass is a smooth material, not a rough one, so it won't hurt pads or rip out nails.

A faster pump will turn over your pool's water more quickly

How quickly a pool's water must be entirely turned over varies from state to state and with the type of pool. Residential pools almost always have slower turnover rates than public pools, though. Although specific times will differ slightly, here are some common turnover times for different types of pools:



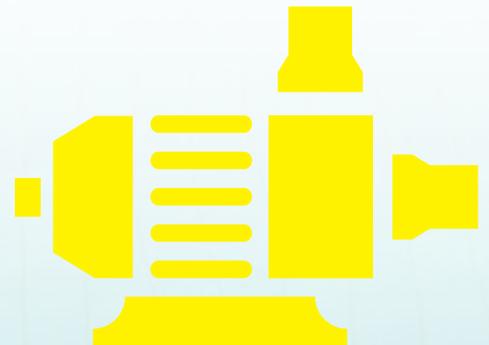
Spas usually filter all of their water every 30 minutes

Public pools typically turn over all of their water every 8 hours

Residential pools often treat all of their water every 24 hours

If only your family and friends are using your pool, turning all of its water over once a day is probably enough to keep the water clear and clean. If a pet's going to be swimming in your pool, though, filtering all of its water every 24 hours likely won't be fast enough to keep the water sanitary. It's been estimated that a single dog introduces as many pollutants into a pool as three people would. If you have multiple dogs, then that figure must be multiplied. Worst of all, some of the things they introduce include fecal matter attached to their fur.

To keep your pool free of bacteria and other contaminants, you'll need to turn its water over more frequently than once a day. A dual- or variable-speed pump provides an energy-efficient way of quickly filtering your pool's water after a pet's been swimming in it. When Fido goes for a dip, simply increase your pump's speed so that it filters water faster. Depending on your specific pump, this could cut the amount of time it takes to filter all of your pool's water in half. When no animals are using your pool, the lowest speed should sufficiently filter the water so you can save on electricity.



Larger pipes will carry debris to your pool's skimmer basket

Skimmer baskets are remarkably efficient at filtering out debris that floats on the water, but they only work if the debris is able to reach them. Dog fur is especially notorious for getting caught in smaller pipes and not reaching the skimmer basket. If enough fur collects in your pool's pipes, it'll block other debris from reaching the skimmer basket and slow the flow of water through your pool's filter.

Make sure all the hair your pets shed will make it to the skimmer basket by installing larger pipes. Instead of using 1.5-inch piping for your pool's filtration system, ask your pool contractor about 2-, 2.5- or even 3-inch wide pipes. Dog hair will be less likely to collect and cause problems in these bigger pipes.

A bigger filter will require less frequent cleaning

No matter what filter you install, it will need to be cleaned more frequently when animals are in your pool. Nevertheless, you can reduce how often your pool's filter needs to be cleaned by installing a larger one. (A larger filter may also be able to accommodate bigger pipes.)

All filters, cartridge and sand, large and small, will clear your water of contaminants brought into your pool by pets. Selecting a bigger one, however, will either make your life easier or save you money. If you perform your own pool maintenance, you'll have to spray or backwash it less often. If you have a cleaning service, you may be able to space out appointments more.

Sanitation: Keeping Your Pool's Water Clean

Chlorine is safe for dogs

Chlorine is considered safe to use in pools that animals swim in. There is not much scientific research that has studied the effects on pets of chemicals used in pools, but there's also little evidence that common pool additives, most notably chlorine, pose a serious threat to dogs and other animals. Veterinarians don't regularly see dogs for chlorine poisoning.

For the most part, **chlorine's effects on dogs are similar to its effects on people**. Drinking a little pool water won't seriously harm your pets, although you shouldn't encourage the habit. The most common issues that arise are minor skin irritations and bloodshot eyes. To reduce the risk of skin irritations, you should rinse off Fido after a swim in your pool, just as you ought to take a quick shower after going for a dip. Redness in the eyes comes from chloramines in the water, which is a sign that the chlorine levels are actually too low, not too high.

Fiberglass and a safety cover will keep your chemical costs affordable

If you've owned a pool before but never let pets in it, you'll notice a significant increase in the amount of chemicals you need to keep your water sanitary and at the proper pH level.

Installing a fiberglass pool and a safety cover, however, can help keep costs for chemicals in check. Because fiberglass is impermeable and doesn't tear, algae don't have any cracks or crevices that they can grow in. A safety cover further reduces algae growth by blocking sunlight when the pool's not in use. A cover alone may reduce algae growth by up to 30 percent.

How much your chemical costs increase when pets use your pool is directly proportional to how frequently your furry friends are in the pool. As the need for chemicals increases, so do the benefits of installing an automatic pool cover. Dogs and other pets will introduce matter that promotes algae growth, but proper chemicals and reduced sunlight will keep algae and bacteria at bay.



Frequent testing will keep your pool sanitary

Finally, you'll need to test your pool more frequently when pets are in it. Remember, the pH of your pool's water should be between 7.2 and 7.6, and you should check it frequently. (Chlorine's effectiveness is reduced to 10 percent if your pool reaches a pH of 8.0.)

It's recommend you become well versed in checking your chlorine and pH levels and that you check them weekly. It's good to keep your regular pool service appointments as well since your local builder will cover additional areas you don't need to maintain on a daily basis..

Safety: Features Your Pets Need and Like

Mark ramps and steps as exit points

While many animals might be happy to jump into a pool, none can scramble out of a pool without a feature that helps them. They can't use a ladder. They need a ramp or steps.

Not only should your pool have at least one of these features, but the entry and exit points should be marked. Although Fido might be able to swim around and find the steps, he could have trouble if there's an accident and he panics. Placing a large, stationary object near the exit that your pets can look for will help them quickly find the exit point, even if they're scared and panicking.

A recognizable object doesn't need to be ugly, but it should be large and different from everything else around your pool. A unique chair or umbrella would work well.

Ledges and benches can provide areas of respite

While in the water, shelves and benches provide pets with places they can rest. While not necessary, consider including a tanning ledge or in-water benches in your pool's design. A shallow end is rarely shallow enough for a pet to stand and keep their head above water, but these features can be made shallow enough for even small animals.

Drinkable water will keep your pets hydrated

Both people and pets are susceptible to heat stroke while playing in the water. When you're around water, it's easy to forget to drink. As mentioned previously, you don't want your animals drinking too much pool water, but you also don't want them becoming dehydrated. Having drinkable water nearby will help them stay hydrated while they're in and out of your pool.

Providing drinkable water can be as simple as placing a water dish within your pool fence's boundary. For added fun, set up a sprinkler that can also be used for rinsing off after swimming.

Safety covers protect pets from becoming trapped while unsupervised



Pool covers provide valuable insulation and keep debris out of pools, but certain types of covers are dangerous to both children and pets.

Safety covers differ from other pool covers in two important ways. First, to be called a safety cover, a pool cover must be able to support one child and two adults. They're strong enough to support a full-grown, large dog. Second, safety covers don't leave a gap between the cover and the side of the pool, so pets can't fall in. If an animal falls into a covered pool, they can often find the way out. Eliminating any gap prevents drowning among unsupervised pets.

If you're going to install a safety cover and your pool is a regular shape (e.g. rectangle), opt for an automatic one. Automatic safety covers will quickly cover your pool when you're getting out, so you can go rinse off Fido.

Activities: Ways to Have Fun with Fido

Swim lessons build life-saving skills

Dogs, surprisingly, aren't born with an innate ability to swim. It's a skill that many breeds pick up quickly, but some, such as small terriers with short legs, struggle with. If your pets haven't been around water before, the first thing you should do with them is help them learn how to doggy paddle. Let them experiment in a shallow area close to the exit point, and bring treats to reward their efforts.

There are lots of games to play with pets



Once your dog is a confident swimmer and comfortable in your pool, there are lots of activities you can enjoy together. You and your pets might enjoy:

- Fetch, throwing a tennis ball that your dog brings back to you
- Monkey in the Middle, keeping a ball away from your pets
- Surfing on a kickboard or boogie board (great for non-canines)
- Catching a ball in mid-air while jumping in
- Diving for an object that sinks (usually best done in a shallow area)

Whatever games you're playing together, remember that pets' claws are sharp. Avoid being scratched up by always keeping yourself at arm's length from pets. If you're playing with a toy, toss it as soon as you get it so they don't try to climb up you to get it.

FAQ About Pets and Pools

Is swimming good for my pet?

Swimming is excellent for both people and pets. It's a non-impact way that even older pets can exercise, and it burns a lot of calories. Even neurologically impaired animals that struggle to stand on land can often stand in shallower water, because the water provides some support for them.

What if my pet can't swim?

If your pet can't swim, they can still have fun in your pool. In addition to going on a tanning ledge, there are many companies that make animal life preservers. These will keep your pet afloat, and they'll be able to paddle around in the deeper water.

What if I don't want to get scratched?

When you're in the water with a pet, there's always a small risk that you could be scratched -- even if you are careful to keep them slightly at bay. If you really don't want to risk being scratched, you can still have fun together by playing fetch or tossing a ball for them to catch in the air. You don't need to be in the water to participate in these games.



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