

Thunderstorms terrify some dogs

BY CAROL CARIDAD

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For many dogs, a thunderstorm is terrifying, even if those dogs are safe and dry indoors. Your dog becomes anxious, clingy and agitated when her high sensitivity to barometric pressure warns her of a coming storm. When the storm hits, she paces, drools, barks at cracks of thunder, hides under things or cowers and shakes. After the storm, she may have trouble settling down; some dogs can be restless for hours, even days afterward.

Thunderstorm rumbles can make dogs panic and engage in behaviors ranging from excessive panting to eating through drywall. Desensitization training can calm some of these dogs – but such training takes a while to work. For storm-phobic pooches who need a quicker relief, the following measures can help:

See if a dog will eat high-value foods during storms. High-value foods are treats your dog likes so much she will do just about anything to score one. For some dogs it's a tasty piece of chicken, for others a warm hot dog bite will do the trick.

Local dog behavior expert Dee Hoult suggests complimentary therapies such as sprays or diffusers that contain dog-appeasing pheromones – similar to the pheromones released by nursing mother dogs.

“Having a pheromone plug in, or spraying pheromone on a bandana on putting that bandana on your dog often helps,” says Hoult. “It's never a bad idea to try spraying your dogs bed with calming pheromones, or even ordering a pheromone diffusing collar that your dog can wear on a daily basis so that when a storm hits your dog is already equipped.”

Some common pheromones are Comfort Zone and D.A.P. Hoult also suggests rubbing a dryer sheet on your dogs fur prior to a storm.

“Yes, it's weird, but sometimes it works! Many dogs are irritated by the static building in their fur.”

Another over the county complimentary therapy is Rescue Remedy (rescueremedy.com), which can be mixed



into your dog's water.

If using high value food and complimentary therapies isn't enough, there is still hope for the storm-phobic canine.

The Anxiety Wrap or the Storm Defender cape are two products that may reduce thunderstorm anxiety in some dogs, but experts suggest acclimating your dog to such products before a storm starts. Log on to <anxietywrap.com> or <stormdefender.com> to learn more.

Some dogs are so afraid of thunderstorms that they need pharmaceutical help to get through them. If your dog is one, your veterinarian may prescribe anti-anxiety medication.

“Most vets carry alternative herbal medicines that can lower anxiety,” says Dr. Robert Pane of South Kendall Animal Clinic.

But when, as dog owners, do we know when we need to seek medical help for our dog's behavior? Dr. Pane recommends that you seek help from your veterinarian when a dog is causing physical damage to itself or your property.

“We frequently recommend multimodal treatments, meaning that we prescribe a medication to help ease a dog's anxiety so that it responds better to desensitization programs.”

It's always better to do more than one thing to discourage anxiety, as simply medicating an animal usually doesn't solve the root of the problem. From calming music for dogs (check out throughadogsear.com) to placing your dog in a dark and quiet room away from windows, there's a lot we can do to help our dogs through storm anxiety.

Visit Paws4You Rescue every Sunday at the PetSmart across from The Falls from 11 a.m.–4 p.m. or at the South Miami Petco on the second and fourth Saturday of the month from 12-4 p.m. At these adoption events, there are volunteers on hand to answer any questions you may have about our adoptable dogs.

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