

Firework Night is approaching and so Christine Bailey is packing, ready to escape the imminent explosions in an attempt to keep her dogs calm and stress-free...

The great escape

In 2004 the legislation concerning fireworks was changed, to limit the permitted noise levels and to prohibit the use of fireworks between 11pm and 7am, apart from four specific days (Guy Fawkes, New Year's Eve, Diwali, and Chinese New Year) and organised displays. Great - or was it?

As soon as the nights draw in, back come the fireworks. This weekend, in mid-September, I heard fireworks going off on both Saturday and Sunday evenings - probably celebrating a wedding or a birthday - and certainly loud enough to frighten my dogs. People still seem determined to watch their money going up in flames, so what can we do to help the seemingly high proportion of dogs that suffer?

The obvious solution, but by no means the simplest, is to get away from the action. For the past 15 years, I have booked a cottage in the middle of nowhere for the weekend closest to November 5th, and for New Year. This means that, although we might still hear the odd bang, it won't actually sound like World War Three.

Of course we can't hibernate all winter, and we will have to cope with the onslaught when it happens, but it's certainly a great start - check out the selection of dog-friendly accommodation in our Classifieds section and online.

My Airedale Ben was absolutely traumatised by fireworks. He used to get into such a state that he would try to escape up the chimney or 'dig' down the plughole in the shower; it was pitiful to see. The following tips are from personal experience.

Make sure your dogs have been well exercised during the day, and are given the chance to go to the loo before it gets dark. Feed them early.

There are various herbal remedies to help dogs relax; many contain valerian and skullcap. Try the tablets from www.dorwest.com or the Calm blend from Phytopet - check www.phytopet.co.uk for stockists.

When there are fireworks, I put on relaxing music. I have, believe it or not, a selection of CDs of calming music designed especially for dogs, but any

relaxing, instrumental music will do!

Try a wrap - it sounds mad, but it has worked for my dogs. I have no personal experience of using Tellington TTouch techniques, but the wrap idea is based on these principles. If you are wondering whether one will work for your dog, try putting an old T-shirt on him, and secure it tightly (while still ensuring adequate blood circulation, obviously!). The calming effect may astonish you as it did me!

Sidehead

I started using a horse-tail bandage as a wrap, but that was fiddly, so if the T-shirt works, consider a product specifically made for dogs. I believe the first such product on the market was the Anxiety Wrap, available from various online retailers. It works very well, but is a bit complicated to put on.

The dog T-shirt from www.equafleece.co.uk is another option, or the newest import from the US - the Thundershirt. This is a superb product. It's easy to get on to the dog even when he is panicking, and the reaction is, in my experience, almost immediate. You can buy the Thundershirt from www.xtradog.com. As the name suggests, the shirts are designed for dogs afraid of thunder or any loud noises; I bought one for my youngster who, when she first came to me,

was petrified of shooting, which made our winter walks something of a trial. The Thundershirt can be worn when out and about; it just looks like a coat.

Many experts recommend providing a dog with a covered 'den', such as a crate. This is sound advice, if you can persuade the dog to go into it of his own accord. Certainly, dogs seem to like the security of being covered; Ben used to squeeze under the computer printer-shelf in a Houdini-like manoeuvre once he was calm enough to seek out a place to 'hide'.

If you are really unable to get away for a specific occasion such as New Year's Eve, consider speaking to your vet about your medication options. I've used a tranquillizer on my dogs once or twice, and found it worked well, but it is certainly not something I would want to use on a regular basis.

I do sometimes feel aggrieved that I am forced away from my own home because of other people's idea of fun, and would love to see fireworks banned from sale to the general public and only permitted at organised displays. I am sure this would be safer for people, pets, livestock and wildlife, but until that great day arrives, I'll continue to escape to the country with my dogs and their calming drops, Thundershirts, and New Age music CDs! ▶▶

Turn over
for some ideas
to make life less
scary for your dog



Take the fright out of firework night!

Here are some top tips and products to help your dog cope through the firework season...



Canine Bowen Technique

When dealing with dogs who find it difficult to cope with the firework season, practitioners of the Canine Bowen Technique (CBT)

take a holistic (whole lifestyle) approach.

CBT is a soft-tissue remedial therapy involving the therapist using fingers or thumbs to move over muscle, ligament, tendon and fascia. This therapy can be effective to help relieve stress, aid relaxation, and reduce underlying tension while achieving a sense of wellbeing. Everyday stress and anxiety make dogs feel under-par and prevents them from functioning at their optimum. By reducing this stress, a dog's coping levels improve when dealing with fireworks and other difficult situations/behavioural issues.

In comparison, for conventional training/behavioural solutions it's vital to know exactly what the issue is: is the anxiety or fear of fireworks really the problem, or has the dog become sound sensitive as a result of long-term stress from another cause, developing into a health issue? These are different cases that need managing in their own way. Without knowledge of the true cause of the problem many dogs may be subjected unnecessarily to behavioural retraining programmes, which may make the situation worse for the dog.

Where dogs are truly anxious or frightened of fireworks, using sound CDs may help as part of a desensitisation retraining programme. However, if dogs with health issues are subjected to such a training programme then it may only make the dog's situation and underlying health issue worse.

Helping your dog to survive fireworks from a holistic viewpoint can be simpler, and, in the long run, cheaper than using conventional, traditional training methods. Using CBT to improve your dog's balance, in conjunction with a lifestyle review and possible stress-reduction programme, isn't always the quickest approach, but it may be the most effective route for your dog's overall well-being, alongside helping him to deal with fireworks.

- For details of your nearest Canine Bowen Technique therapist, see www.caninebowentechnique.com

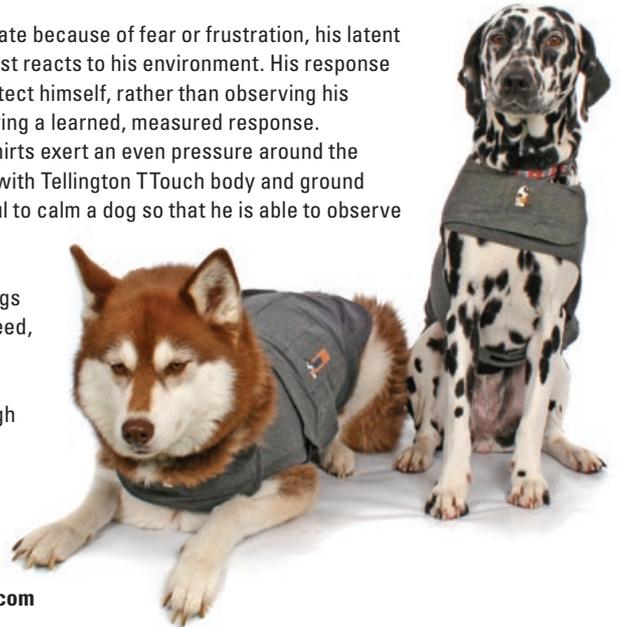
The Thundershirt

When a dog is in a highly aroused state because of fear or frustration, his latent nervous system takes over and he just reacts to his environment. His response may be to deflect, flee, freeze or protect himself, rather than observing his environment, thinking and then offering a learned, measured response.

When correctly fitted, Thundershirts exert an even pressure around the chest, shoulders and ribcage. Used with Tellington TTouch body and ground work, they can be particularly helpful to calm a dog so that he is able to observe and think, rather than just react.

Thundershirts, as the name suggests, were designed to help dogs who suffer fear of thunder and, indeed, they help many dogs in this way. However, Thundershirts can also be very useful when working through retraining programmes with dogs who are reactive or shy and those who do not travel well.

- Thundershirts are available from Xtra Dog. Call 0330 088 3647 or visit www.thundershirt.xtradog.com



Nupafeed Stress-Less

Stress-Less is a completely unique, healthy and 100 per cent natural remedy to help tackle firework fear. It contains a unique magnesium compound, MAH®, which the body uses to manage stress reactions, naturally reducing the release of stress hormones and preventing hypersensitivity, without any sedative action.

Safe to use alongside other medications, strictly no herbs, valerian or other sedative ingredients are used; the company's aim is to prevent stress at its cause rather than forcing an artificial calm. The dog's feeding regime can be adjusted to suit each dog.

- Stress-Less is not available in the shops. For advice or to order, telephone 01438 861900, email info@nupafeed.net or visit www.nupafeed-dogs.co.uk



Canadian Tree Essences

Animal Rescue, a natural organic healing essence from Canadian Tree Essences, offers broad-ranging emotional support for all animals. Keep it handy, ready for bonfire night, even giving it to your pet the day before, if you know your animal is frightened by fireworks. It has a speedy calming effect and helps to alleviate the distress an animal experiences at times of physical or emotional trauma, and supports the healing action of other essences as well as medicines and homoeopathic remedies. There are no contra-indications. This is just one product from our excellent Animal Essence range. Priced at just £13.99 for a large 30ml bottle, it is a must for every pet owner.

- All products available online at www.canadiantreeessences.co.uk or email Angela at Mail@canadiantreeessences.co.uk

Clarke Heavy-Duty Dog Kennel

The Clarke easy-to-assemble sturdy kennel or animal pen provides a secure easy-to-move or permanent shelter for your dog or other animal. It has a sturdy 25mm steel frame with wire-mesh grills, topped with a tough triple-layer green polythene cover, which is UV-treated and waterproof. The innovative push button snap-roof design allows for quick assembly, with nickel-plated powder-coated connectors for stability and longevity. It also features an escape-proof lockable latch for added peace of mind. The kennel measures 2.4 x 1.2 x 1.7m (LxWxH).

- Call 0115 956 5555, visit www.machinemart.co.uk or email customerservice@machine.co.uk



Take the fright out of firework night!

Beat firework fears!

The Company of Animals has put together 10 top tips to help keep you and your dog calm and phobia free this firework season.

1. Desensitisation

Teach your dog that the sounds of fireworks are nothing to fear. This can be done by exposing your dog to similar sounds at a volume that he can manage. The CLIX Noise and Sounds CD is perfect for this.

2. Create a safe haven

Create an area and teach your pet that this is a place of safety, relaxation and comfort that they can use when they feel scared or unsure. It is different to a 'bolt hole' where your pet would run, hide and feel very scared and panicked.

3. Surprise

Try to take your dog for his walk and provide him with an opportunity to pee and poo before the fireworks start going off.

4. Sound-proofing

Sometimes having the radio or television on a little higher may help fade the firework sounds. Think about closing your curtains earlier, too, before the fireworks start.

5. Be confident and relaxed

If your pet seems worried, do not react by being worried yourself, as your pet will pick up on this emotion and it will make him more anxious. So, remain calm and confident in your actions. However, if your dog is terrified, then by all means comfort him.

6. Keep your dog occupied

Provide your dog with something he enjoys to keep him distracted, such as a marrow bone, marrow chew or a stuffed KONG.

7. Remedies

The Company of Animals recommends HomeoPet Anxiety TFNL drops, which are easy to give your dog before the fireworks start or while they are going on.

8. Neighbours

If you are planning on raising the volume on your radio or TV, it may be advisable to explain to your neighbours why this is. Your dog may also bark more during the fireworks.

9. Professional help

If your pet is overly frightened and is even hurting himself in the panic, then contact your vet, who should be able to prescribe medication to help your pet manage through this extremely stressful period.

10. Prevention is better than cure

Start your preparation early; do not wait for your dog to become distressed before you start to do something about it.

● For more information, contact Kirsten Dillon at the Company of Animals on 01932 566696 or visit www.companyofanimals.co.uk

MagiCalm from VetVits

With Guy Fawkes just around the corner, it's time to think about your dog's safety and wellbeing on the night. It's particularly traumatic for dogs of a naturally nervous disposition, but any dog can be spooked by fireworks. If you're worried about your pet, there are naturally soothing solutions available, including new MagiCalm from VetVits. This natural calmer has been specially formulated to promote a sense of wellbeing and calm in dogs and contains soothing chamomile, triple source magnesium, B vitamins and L-tryptophan.

VetVits' vet, John Foster, explains more: "MagiCalm contains four key ingredients, and each plays a vital role in reducing physical and mental tensions in your pet. It can be taken on an ongoing basis to help soothe pets that are prone to over-excitability or given when your dog needs additional support."

● Costing £7.95 for 60 tablets, it is available exclusively from www.vetvits.co.uk and delivered straight to your door.



Portable hug

With bonfire night now seeming to extend over a week rather than just one night, the issue of stressed dogs is increasingly problematic. Rather than medicating, the Equafleece T-Shirt Body is best described as a 'portable hug', and is highly recommended by Tellington Touch practitioners and vets as a non-chemical aid to calming.

For nearly a decade the well-fitted T-shirt Body has reassured numerous anxious dogs swiftly and effectively, and has continued to

comfort time and time again. The Equafleece T-Shirt Body offers an inexpensive way to address problems with fireworks and other loud noises, such as thunder and gun fire.

Pet owner Rebecca Reeves says, "I could not believe how incredible effective the T-shirt was in calming my Greyhound, and how quickly. She changed from being a shaking, drooling wreck into a snoozing, relaxed dog in a matter of minutes the first time I used the Equafleece T-shirt. It continued to work brilliantly during fireworks and thunderstorms for the rest of her life."

● The T-Shirt Body comes in six sizes, starting at £13, and is available direct from the Equafleece website www.equafleece.co.uk (http://www.equafleece.co.uk/store/dog_t_shirts.html). To request a brochure or to order by phone, call 0845 123 5296.



Pet Remedy

Formulated with the help of vets and RSPCA rescue centres, Pet Remedy is the 100 per cent natural way to tackle stress and anxiety in pets. This handy diffuser releases a blend of calming essential oils and offers a great solution for anxious cats and dogs as well as other pets.

Opt for the Pet Remedy plug-in diffuser (£20) or the Pet Remedy calming spray (£18) and witness the change in your dog's behaviour.

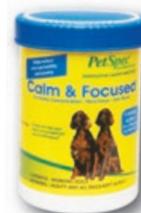
● Available from www.petremedy.co.uk

PetSpec Calm & Focused

Bonfire night is a stressful occasion for many dogs, but help is on hand thanks to PetSpec Calm & Focused.

A daily additive that increases focus and offsets the effects of stress, PetSpec Calm & Focused helps to:

- * Reduce fear of loud noises, such as fireworks and thunder
- * Improve focus and obedience
- * Reduce anxiety and over-excitability



PetSpec Calm & Focused does not sedate, can be fed long-term and is wheat-gluten free.

It is formulated by experienced nutritionists with scientifically proven ingredients including tryptophan, a natural precursor of serotonin, and the yeast products FOS and MOS to help maintain a healthy gut environment.

A 500g tub of PetSpec Calm & Focused will last a typical retriever (30kg) for over nine weeks.

Save 10 per cent and get free postage and packing on all orders at www.petspec.co.uk by quoting lessstress0511 in the promotional code box.

● Contact PetSpec on 01845 565030 and visit www.petspec.co.uk