

Bedding for dogs and cats

When selecting bedding material for an animal put yourself in their shoes and consider their needs: Do they need support, warmth, extra padding? Will they chew or eat the bedding?

Any material that is used should have these features:

- non-toxic
- economical
- provide warmth and padding
- be suitable for the animal provided for
- easily cleaned
- if it needs to be disposed of, can this be done easily?

Common types of bedding

The common types of bedding used for dogs and cats include:

- woollen blankets
- cotton sheeting
- towels
- carpet mats
- rubber matting
- trampoline beds
- shredded newspaper
- synthetic polar fleece
- sheepskin
- hessian bag trampoline beds
- heat pads
- canvas or material covered foam pads.

The table below shows the two main categories of bedding material.

Natural fibres	Synthetic fibres
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main advantage in using natural materials, such as wool or cotton, is that there is less chance of allergic reactions in the animals. • Natural materials breathe and allow the animal to dissipate heat where synthetic materials, such as polar fleece, do not. • Bedding such as sheepskin is difficult to wash and maintain but makes ideal beds for very young or old animals. However, their cost is often prohibitive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthetic materials are easier to maintain than wool and require less careful washing. Although cotton sheeting and towels are easy to wash, they do not provide any bulk which would pad the floor for the animal.

The table below compares the advantages and disadvantages of different types of bedding:

Types of bedding	Advantages and disadvantages
Acrylic bedding—fluffy dog beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This type of bedding is widely used, both domestically and in kennels. • It is very expensive to purchase but more resistant to chewing than blankets. • This type of bedding is easier to launder than blankets as it is resistant to organic material; even dried on debris can usually be removed by soaking. • The properties that make it particularly suitable for hospital use are that it allows body fluids through, thus keeping an animal relatively comfortable and dry, and it is sufficiently supportive which reduces the occurrence of pressure sores in elderly and recumbent animals.
Newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper is widely used by kennels and hospitals as it is freely available and absorbent. • Many kennels line the bed area with newspaper and place a blanket or similar on top. It is rarely used on its own as bedding as it is not warm or comfortable enough for the animal. • Another disadvantage of newspaper is that the newsprint will stain, particularly when wet. Dogs with light coloured coats and light coloured kennelling are likely to stain.
Shredded newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shredded newspaper is very cheap, provides reasonable warmth but is messy and difficult to contain within the kennel. The staining previously mentioned can also be a problem. • It will stick to an animal's coat if damp and is not suitable for use with animals that have discharging wounds as it is liable to attach itself to such areas. • It has the advantage over newspaper in that it is

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	<p>bulky and therefore warmer. Healthy dogs in a kennel situation find this form of bedding very comfortable and appear to enjoy arranging it and burying their toys in it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some animals may eat it but small amounts usually cause little harm.
Blankets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless donated or old blankets are used, they can be an expensive form of bedding, particularly as they may be chewed and torn up by some destructive dogs. • Dogs with allergies to dust mites may not be suited to this type of bedding if it is not laundered regularly using very hot washing water. • Blankets are, however a traditional warm bedding and are often used in domestic circumstances, and owners like to see them used in kennels. • They are not suitable for hospital kennels or housing infectious disorders as they are difficult to sterilise.
Whelping boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of bedding inside a whelping box or drum has the added advantage of providing warmth and insulation. • These whelping beds can be made from plastic drums with the end cut out and half then slotted back in, so that the bitch can step out but the puppies cannot.
Trampoline beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvas covered trampoline beds provide support, warmth and ventilation. • The disadvantages are that the beds take some time to dry and can be awkward and heavy to move around. This also applies to hessian bag trampoline beds. • The use of split rubber over a frame and then attached with pop riveting can provide an excellent bed. It is possible to hinge these frames onto the walls so that when cleaned they can be lifted and hooked up during the day to allow drying of the kennel.
Covered foam pads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are generally used in conjunction with a traditionally shaped foam and fabric, or plastic moulded bed. • They can also be chewed and once damaged should be repaired or removed as soon as possible because chunks of foam can be more easily torn off by a dog once the pad has been initially damaged. • It is fairly easily laundered, warm and comfortable and is supportive enough to reduce the occurrence of pressure sores. • In some cases, thick foam pads covered with waterproof material are found useful in a hospital situation where very large breeds are recumbent. The additional thickness assists in the support of these

	<p>very heavy animals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Due to the thickness and size of these pads, they are very difficult to launder but the waterproof covering can be cleaned/disinfected by wiping with a chemical disinfectant and a cloth.
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Disposal and washing of bedding

If bedding is to be used for more than one animal, it is important to ensure that the material is clean and disinfected.

Bedding should first have any faeces removed if badly soiled. Then it should be soaked overnight. The main way to achieve this is to wash the material and to disinfect it with a suitable chemical.

Hanging out bedding in the sunlight is a very effective method of disinfection, but not for infectious diseases.

Trampoline beds should be hosed off then disinfected and allowed to dry in the sunlight. All joins where rubber meets metal, should be scrubbed with a small stiff brush.

Disposable bedding

Bedding which is to be disposed of should be cleaned of faeces then placed in a suitable plastic bag.

This should be disposed of in accordance with council requirements.