

# Your Dog



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## PRODUCTS

By Phyllis DeGioia

### Sweaters and coats aren't frivolities

They help keep aging, ill and small breeds at a healthy temperature

■ Some people believe that putting a jacket, coat or sweater on a dog humanizes him. The reality is that elderly or ill dogs, and toy breeds in particular, often need help staying warm in cold weather. Unfortunately, some of the frivolous outfits they wear dim our view of dogs in coats even when the coats are beneficial.

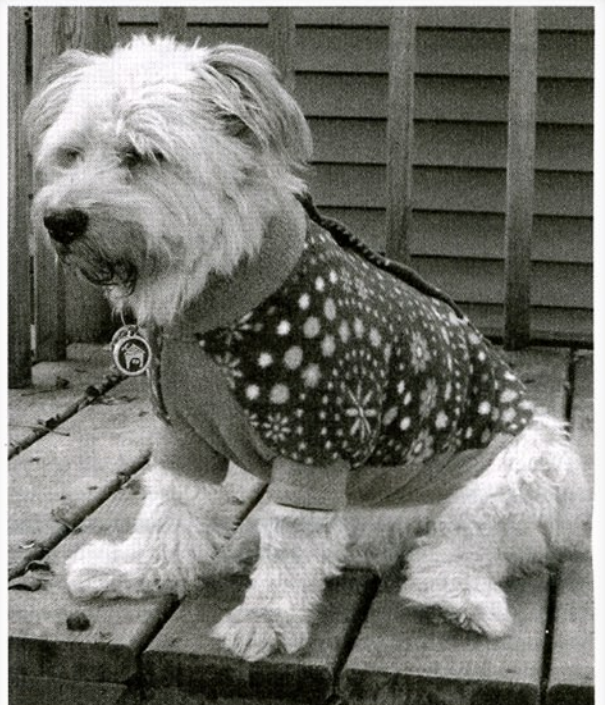
Outer wear helps small dogs maintain a healthy body temperature in winter. "They have a much higher surface area to body mass than large dogs and will lose more heat to the environment," says Scott Shaw, DVM, a specialist in emergency and critical care at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University.

Sight hounds, such as greyhounds and whippets, are also more susceptible to cold. "They have less body fat and are less able to retain body heat," Dr. Shaw says. However, the inverse is not true: Overweight dogs are not warmer in winter.

There's no rule about low temperatures and conditions that are hazardous for dogs. They vary by breed. "A husky might be perfectly happy in a driving blizzard while a Chihuahua would freeze to death in minutes," Dr. Shaw says. Dogs who like to run fast no matter how cold it is will be able to stay warmer longer than a dog of the same weight and build who's merely walking. Activity helps to maintain body temperature, so perpetual motion machines will remain warmer.

One of my testers is a perpetual motion machine, otherwise known as a sporting breed: He's 5-year-old English Setter Dodger. He's not fond of sleeves — they add a level of difficulty for most dogs. Otherwise, a coat is about the same to him as a no-pull harness. My other tester is 13½-year-old Ginger, a small terrier mix. She's still fairly light on her feet, but this winter is going to be tough on her old bones.

Overall, I find the styles that Velcro over the chest and abdomen are the easiest to put on but at the same time afford the least protection, especially in keeping the underside free of ice and snow balls. What works best for your dog will depend on your climate and how well he tolerates sleeves. Generally, the measurements you'll need to determine size are girth — around the rib cage right under the front armpits. ■



**BEST  
VALUE**

#### Fido Fleece provides warmth, affordability and craftsmanship

I've always liked Fido Fleece, and in this test it came out on top. It's one of the warmest, most reasonably priced and well-made coats around. Once you put the dog's legs in, close the back from neck to tail base with sturdy Velcro. Premier Pet, the manufacturer, offers a dozen prints, including houndstooth, plaids and bones. Neither of my dogs likes sleeves, but once they're in a Fido Fleece, it's all good. The sweater kept Ginger's abdomen dry — remarkable because of her short legs. It's machine washable and line dried, as are the others in this review except for the rain jacket.

**Cost:** \$22 to \$52. **Sizes:** 12- to 44-inch girths.  
**Colors:** 12 color/print combinations.  
**Information:** [www.fidofleece.com](http://www.fidofleece.com), (800) 933-5595.

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