

Leaving a dog with a boarding facility during the holidays can feel as complicated as planning a trip for a small, furry relative. The impulse to pack every toy and every towel is real, but experience shows that thoughtful preparation matters more than volume. This boarding packing guide reflects years of dropping off dogs at kennels, boutique pet hotels, and in-home sitters, and it focuses on what actually reduces stress for your dog and the staff caring for them.

Why the right packing matters Holiday boarding creates two problems at once. Facilities often run at capacity and staff are busier than usual, and dogs experience a change in routine at a time when owners need reliable coverage. A clear, labeled bundle of essential items speeds intake, reduces lost belongings, and gives caregivers immediate cues about feeding, medication, and comfort. For your dog, familiar scents and a predictable schedule ease anxiety and lower the chance of behavior issues that cost you extra time or boarding pricing penalties.

Choose the right facility first Packing is only half the job. Good facility selection saves you from packing for the wrong environment. If your dog sleeps in a crate at home, find a facility that offers crate rest or accepts crates from owners. If your dog needs supervised play, confirm staff-to-dog ratios and the presence of secure play areas. Ask about dog boarding schedule details: meal times, walk frequency, and how staff document behavior and incidents. These answers will determine which items you must send and which the facility already provides.

What to pack: essentials that matter Below is a concise checklist of the most important items to bring. Each item is chosen to solve a specific, recurring problem I have seen when owners assume the facility will cover everything.

- **Food:** enough for the entire stay plus two extra days, in the original packaging with feeding instructions clearly written.
- **Medication:** labeled doses and a written schedule, including administration method and whether it must be given with food.
- **Bedding:** a small, durable item with your scent — not the family sofa cushion — labeled with your name and phone number.
- **Collar and leash:** a comfortable, well-fitting collar with ID tag and a sturdy leash; include a spare collar if your dog chews.
- **Comfort item:** one small toy or an article of clothing with your scent, washed recently and labeled.

Why each item earns its place Food prevents gastrointestinal upset. Many dogs experience diarrhea when facilities switch brands, and staff sometimes restrict access to food left in loose containers. Bringing food in the original package preserves the ingredient list for caregivers and helps them follow the dog boarding schedule you prefer. Quantities should cover the stay plus a buffer. Holidays can create travel delays, so add two extra days worth when you pack.

Medications require clarity. Staff do not guess. Bring pill organizers or pre-measured doses if possible, and include a signed instruction sheet with your veterinarian's contact. If your dog receives injections, confirm whether the facility's staff will administer them or if a visiting vet is needed. For long term boarding situations, leave medication refills or prescriptions with clear instructions at drop off.

Bedding serves two purposes: comfort and containment. A small bed or blanket with your scent reduces stress, but bulky items are likely to be misplaced or rejected. Use something that fits into a kennel without crowding the space. Facilities appreciate washable bedding; avoid antique quilts or anything you would hate to lose.

Collars and leashes are simple but critical. Some facilities require quick access to an ID tag in emergencies. If your dog is microchipped, still leave a collar with tags. For dogs that react poorly to strangers, consider a no-pull

harness and label it so staff can use the same handling method you do. Keep a spare collar and tag if your dog chews or has a history of escape attempts.

Comfort items must be limited and durable. Stuffed toys with squeakers are frequently ruined and become a choking hazard. Opt for a single, familiar toy and a worn T-shirt that smells like you. That small piece of home can transform the first night, when many dogs pace or vocalize.

Label everything and provide a contact sheet A straightforward contact sheet prevents miscommunication. Include your cell, the name and number of a local emergency contact, and your vet's phone. Note behavioral triggers, medical conditions, and whether your dog is comfortable with strangers, children, or other dogs.

Labeling is nonnegotiable. Use a permanent marker on fabric tags or a small iron-on name patch. For bowls, collars, and toys, waterproof labels or masking-tape tags work well. Facilities will not accept unlabeled items into communal areas, and unlabeled items are rarely returned.

Packing for special situations Puppies, seniors, and high-anxiety dogs need different items and instructions. A three-month-old puppy often requires more frequent feeding and potty breaks than a typical dog boarding schedule allows. For puppies, pack potty pads, a small crate blanket, and a short list of training commands staff should use. For elderly dogs with arthritis, include a ramp if your dog uses one at home, joint supplements in labeled doses, and a soft bed with low edges for easy access.

If you expect long term boarding, bring multiple sets of bedding and toys and detailed routines. Long term boarding creates more wear on items and greater risk of loss, so minimize sentimental or expensive belongings. Discuss weekly updates or video check-ins with the facility. For extended stays, confirm how often staff launder bedding and rotate toys to reduce wear and odor.

Dealing with dietary needs and allergies Food-related mistakes are common. Bring kibble in sealed bags or the original box with the guaranteed analysis visible. If your dog eats canned food, provide clearly labeled cans and an instruction sheet that states how much to feed and whether leftovers should be refrigerated. Note any food allergies explicitly and highlight cross-contamination risks, especially if the facility uses communal feeding bowls or treats during daycare sessions.

If your dog is on a restricted diet, consider pre-portioning meals into labeled containers. This reduces errors and speeds intake during busy holiday drop-offs. Some facilities charge for staff time spent preparing meals, so ask about boarding pricing related to special feeding needs.

Medications and administration nuances List medications in order of administration with the time of day and whether they should be given with food. If medications require special handling, like refrigeration or pill crushing, provide necessary tools and a note from your veterinarian. Insulin-dependent dogs should have a written protocol and emergency contact for your veterinarian, as well as syringes and dosing instructions. Confirm whether staff are trained to administer injections; some facilities subcontract nursing care for these services.

If your dog takes supplements or medications that affect behavior or sedation, notify staff. Sedative drugs administered before or during boarding should be cleared with both your vet and the boarding facility. Misapplied sedatives can make a dog vulnerable in group settings.

Paperwork and legalities Bring vaccination records in hard copy and verify facility vaccine requirements ahead of time. Many facilities require up-to-date rabies, distemper/parvo, and bordetella. If your dog has a medical waiver or a recent illness, provide a note from the vet. For holiday boarding, submit paperwork early; many places lock their schedule and require forms 48 hours before drop-off.

Discuss liability and emergency care on paper. Most facilities have a standard consent form allowing them to seek emergency vet care; if you prefer a specific clinic or have financial limits, state them clearly on the form. Be

realistic about boarding pricing and emergency fees. Choose a facility with transparent policies on emergency care and estimate potential out-of-pocket costs for worst-case scenarios.

What not to pack Avoid sending anything that can encourage resource guarding or cause injury. No rawhide chews, delicate plush toys with small parts, or expensive designer collars. Do not send large, heavy furniture-like beds that will be impractical in kennels. If your dog has a history of chewing, leave chewables aside and rely on an approved dental chew type that staff recommend.

When leaving treats, avoid anything that could trigger allergies in other dogs if your pet will be in group play. Leave treats in a sealed container and clearly label how and when they should be used. If staff need to hold treats until supervised sessions, note that on the contact sheet.

Managing drop-off and pick-up Time your drop-off to avoid the busiest windows. Early morning check-ins allow staff to introduce your dog calmly before the holiday rush. Arrive with your paperwork completed, food pre-measured, and items labeled. If your dog is nervous, allow a five- to ten-minute acclimation period; rushing straight out often leads to louder goodbyes and more stress.

When picking up, expect staff to give a short report. Ask about changes in appetite, bathroom habits, and any behavioral incidents. If a staff member recommends a follow-up vet visit, get the exact wording on a written note. For long term boarding, schedule periodic progress updates so you are not surprised at pickup.

Pricing, value, and trade-offs Boarding pricing varies widely. A basic kennel may charge half the price of a boutique pet hotel that offers webcam access and luxury bedding. The trade-off is staff attention and socialization. If your dog needs one-on-one time, compare prices for add-on services like private walks or enrichment sessions. Some facilities charge by service, others bundle everything into a premium daily rate. Ask whether holiday dates carry surcharges; many places add 10 to 25 percent for peak holidays.

Budget without penny-pinching. Cheaper facilities can be excellent, but make sure they can meet any special needs you listed. Conversely, an expensive facility does not guarantee perfect care; verify staff training, turnover rates, and actual living conditions.

Final tips from experience Pack a short note for staff with two clear, prioritized instructions in case of conflicting needs. For example, first priority: stop any nonessential medication if vomiting occurs; second priority: call the owner before altering medications. That kind of hierarchy helps staff make safe, quick decisions.

Photograph the items you bring and take a last-minute picture of your dog before drop-off. Photos help with recovery if something is misplaced and provide a timestamped record of your dog's appearance at departure.

If you have a dog with separation anxiety, <https://beta2.communityimpact.com/austin/round-rock/business/2026/01/12/hip-hounds-works-with-owners-to-care-for-round-rock-dogs/> arrange a trial day or an overnight stay well before the holiday. A single overnight helps both the dog and the staff learn what works and prevents surprises during a long holiday boarding period.

A realistic packing timeline Start compiling items one week before departure. Confirm vaccinations and any required paperwork 10 days out. For long term boarding, consolidate multiple bedding sets and mark a mid-stay refresh date with the facility. On the day of travel, pack the essentials listed earlier plus: a recent photo of your dog, your contact sheet, and copies of any prescription labels.

Packing for holiday boarding does not need to be frantic. It benefits from a deliberate, prioritized approach that anticipates delays, staff needs, and the dog's emotional comfort. With the right food, medications, a small scent item, and clear labeling and paperwork, you increase the odds that your dog's stay will be calm, comfortable, and uneventful. That is the best gift you can give both your dog and the people watching over them.