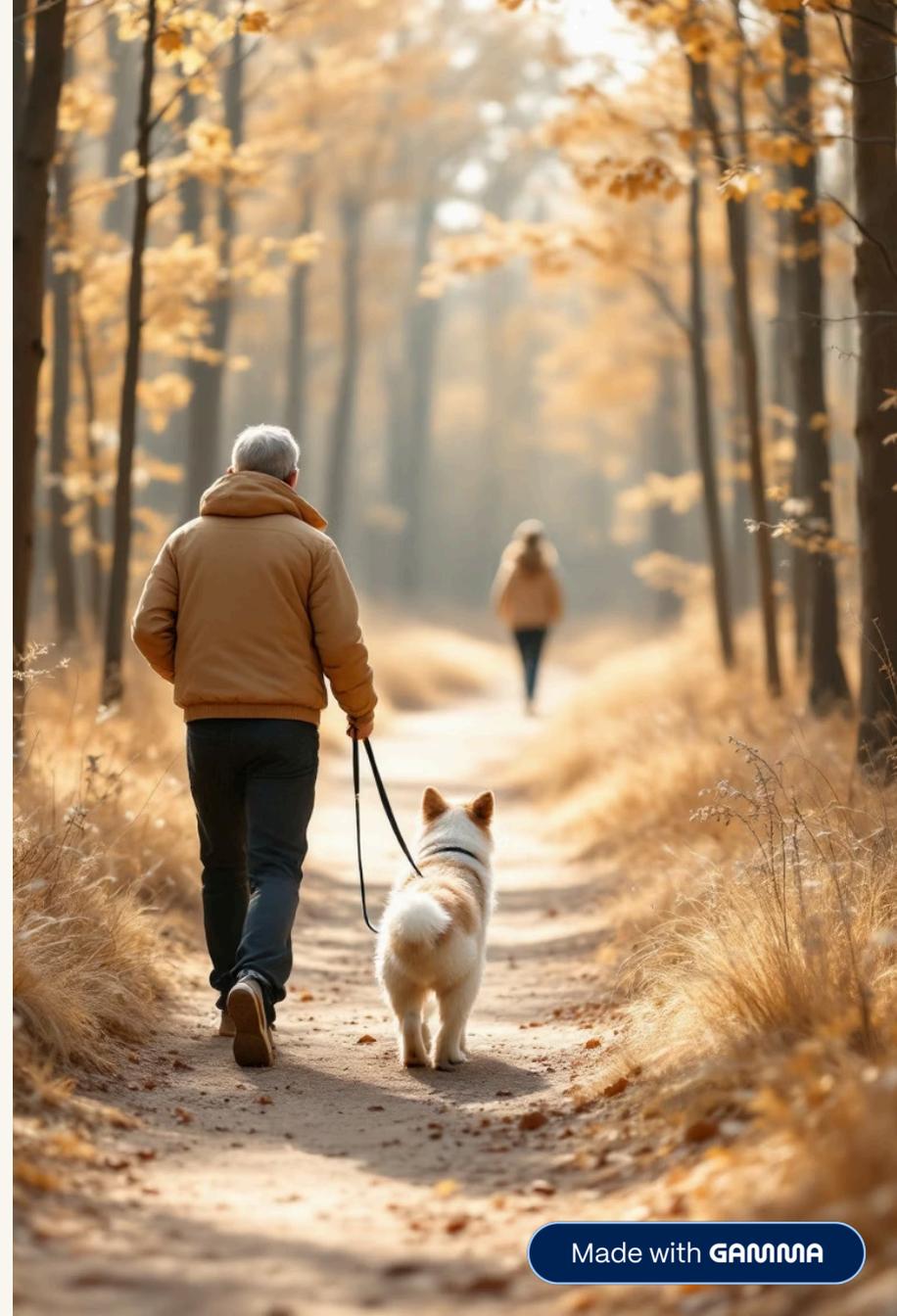


Hiking with Your Dog: A Guide to Safe and Fun Trail Adventures

Hiking with your dog is a great way to get them involved in your everyday life and spend time with the whole family. Take a look at this blog post to learn more about what to expect, what to bring, and a list of a few of our favorite dog friendly trails in the Madison area



Know Before You Go

Check Trail Rules

Always verify if dogs are allowed on your chosen trail. National Parks often restrict dogs, while local parks tend to be more pet-friendly. Make sure to look for specific leash requirements and seasonal restrictions before heading out on your adventure. Some trails in Wisconsin are not accessible in the winter months for hikers.

Trail Manners Training

Start with basic obedience training: a reliable sit, stay, and heel command are essential when walking on tight paths. Have your dog practice responding to these commands around all types of distractions to ensure they are able to reliably listen when you are out.

Essential Gear for Hiking with Your Dog



Safety & Control

Avoid retractable leashes which offer less control on trails. Use your normal walking gear and with a leash that is no longer than 6-feet.



Canine Cargo

Consider bringing along a doggy backpack for longer hikes. When introducing these to your dog, start with empty packs and gradually add light items your dog can comfortably carry. *Do not exceed anything that is over 10-15% of their body weight.*



Trail Essentials

Pack collapsible water bowls, paw protection, waste bags, and a **canine first aid kit** with bandages, antiseptic wipes, tick removal tools, and emergency contact info.

Building Endurance: Conditioning Your Dog

Start your hiking journey with short, easy trails. Gradually increase both duration and elevation as your dog builds stamina. Pay close attention to your dog's energy levels—panting is normal, but excessive fatigue, lagging behind, or limping are signs to turn back.

Remember that breed matters: working and sporting breeds typically handle longer distances better than brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds or toy dogs. And always avoid hiking in extreme heat—dogs overheat faster due to their fur and limited cooling ability.



Trail Etiquette: Keeping Everyone Safe

Leash Requirements

Always keep your dog leashed, even if they have perfect recall. This protects wildlife, prevents conflicts with other hikers, and keeps your dog safe from cliff edges, poisonous plants, and getting lost.

Controlled Encounters

Not everyone loves dogs or feels comfortable around them. Keep your dog close when passing others and ask before allowing your dog to approach other hikers or dogs.

Leave No Trace

Always leave the trail better than you found it. Pick up after your dog and yourself. This is important to keep wildlife safe and the trails clean and fun for everyone to enjoy.

Hydration and Nutrition on the Trail



Pack plenty of fresh water for both you and your dog—dogs typically need 8 ounces of water per 10 pounds of body weight per day of hiking, and more in hot weather. Offer water breaks every 15-30 minutes.

For longer hikes, bring protein-rich treats to give your dog to keep their stamina up. Always prevent your dog from drinking from stagnant water that might harbor harmful bacteria or parasites.

Handling Trail Hazards



Pest Protection

Apply vet-recommended tick and flea preventatives before hiking. Check your dog thoroughly after every hike, paying special attention to ears, armpits, and between toes where ticks often hide.



Wildlife Awareness

Research local wildlife risks before hiking. Keep dogs leashed to prevent chasing wildlife, which can lead to dangerous encounters.



Terrain Challenges

Choose appropriate trails for your dog's abilities. Watch for sharp rocks, hot surfaces, and ice that can damage paws. Consider dog booties for rough terrain or extreme temperatures.

Dog-Friendly Hiking Spots in Madison

Pheasant Branch Conservancy

Features 9+ miles of dog-friendly trails through prairie, woodland and marsh habitats. Leashed dogs welcome year-round with convenient waste stations throughout.

Indian Lake County Park

Offers 8 miles of scenic trails with moderate elevation changes perfect for conditioning. The cool lake provides a refreshing splash for dogs on hot days.

Capital Springs State Recreation Area

Connects to the Capital City Trail with 10+ miles of pet-friendly paths through diverse ecosystems. Features dedicated dog exercise areas where pets can roam off-leash.

Picnic Point Marsh Loop

A 2.1 mile loop into Lake Mendota in Madison. It provides lake views, a restored prairie, and peaceful trails to enjoy with your pup.

Tenny Park

Mostly paved trails along Lake Mendota and the Yahara River that offer views of Madison as well as the water. A great place to take the entire family!

Ready, Set, Hike!

Your outdoor adventures with your dog will create lifelong memories for the whole family and an unbreakable bond. Start slow, gradually building both of your skills, and remember that the journey matters more than the destination.

Always prioritize your dog's safety and comfort—watch for signs of fatigue or discomfort and know when to turn back. With proper preparation and respect for nature, hiking with your dog will become one of everyone's favorite activities. The trails are waiting for both of you!

