

Leaving a dog for a week is more than handing over a leash and keys. It is about anticipating the small needs that make a stay smooth, minimizing stress for your dog, and giving the boarding facility everything it needs to care for your companion without guesswork. A well-packed bag shortens the adjustment period, reduces mistakes, and often lowers boarding pricing surprises since staff are not improvising. Below I walk through what to bring, what to leave out, how to prepare paperwork and medication, and how to tailor your choices for holiday boarding or longer-term stays.

Why thoughtful packing matters If you have ever returned to collect a dog who seems less themselves — pacing more, chewing bedding, refusing food — the cause is often a lack of familiar cues. Scented items, consistent feeding routines, and clear instructions do more to preserve behavior than a stack of treats. Facilities understand this; the best will ask for details about your dog's schedule, temperament, and medical needs. Packing with intent makes the staff's job easier, keeps your dog calmer, and can prevent extra charges for special handling.

A short checklist of truly essential items Use this compact checklist the night before departure; it covers items I consistently find missing when dogs arrive.

- labeled food in original packaging or sealed portioned bags, measured for each meal and with feeding instructions.
- collar with ID tag, leash, and a spare flat buckle collar (no slip collars for boarding).
- current vaccination records and any required intake forms from the facility.
- prescription medications, clearly labeled with dosing times, amounts, and administration notes.
- one small, familiar-smelling bedding item or worn T-shirt.

Choosing food and feeding supplies Bring your dog's usual food in its original bag whenever possible. The ingredient list and brand printed on the bag help staff troubleshoot digestive issues and avoid substitute foods that can lead to an upset stomach. For a week-long stay, pre-portion meals into individual bags or containers labeled with date and time. That saves time and reduces the chance of incorrect portions, especially during busy holiday boarding periods when staff may be stretched thin.

If you use a kibble topper, raw feeder, or home-cooked diet, include a clear written description of how you prepare it and how much to feed. For sensitive stomachs, enclose a small extra bag of a bland diet your dog tolerates so staff can switch temporarily without introducing a new brand.

Bring a sturdy, non-tip bowl or note whether you want the facility to use their own. Many places use stainless steel for hygiene; if your dog refuses unfamiliar bowls, include a plastic or ceramic one you know they accept.

Comfort and scent items that work One small, scent-heavy item is better than half a suitcase. A worn cotton T-shirt or a small pillowcase with your scent helps reduce anxiety. Avoid huge beds unless the facility explicitly allows and can launder them between stays. Choose items that are easily washable and not irreplaceable.

Toys are important, but pick wisely. Dense chew toys or puzzle feeders that slow eating are helpful; soft plush toys must be machine-washable and not have parts that can be ingested. If your dog has resource guarding tendencies, disclose that and send fewer toys. Facilities appreciate clear labeling and a note about which toys are for supervised play only.

Medication and medical instructions Medications must be in original pharmacy bottles or clearly labeled packaging. Tape a simple dosing card to each bottle with times, amounts, and how to administer — for example, whether medication goes with food. If you are comfortable, demonstrate administration the drop-off day. Include any over-the-counter supplements with instructions and a brief note on why they are given.

If your dog has injections, insulin, or requires temperature-sensitive medicine, inform the facility ahead of time so staff with medical training are available. For long term boarding or dogs with chronic conditions, arrange a quick training or demonstration with staff before you leave. Ask whether the facility charges extra for medical administration; boarding pricing often increases when specialized care is required.

Documentation, identification, and emergency contacts Bring vaccination records printed or on a device, plus microchip information and the number of your primary veterinarian. Leave a local emergency contact who can make decisions if you are unreachable, and include your itinerary with reachable phone numbers or an expected return date. Sign any consent forms required for emergency care and state whether you authorize surgical procedures or only stabilization until you can be reached.

If you anticipate holiday boarding, provide alternative contacts and consider giving permission for a nearby vet to treat your dog. Holiday hours and holiday boarding surges can delay communication, so planning reduces delays in care.

Behavior notes and the boarding schedule Write a clear, single-page behavior summary that outlines your dog's typical day: wake-up time, potty schedule, energy level, leash reactivity, calm-down routine, and cues you use for settling. Staff appreciate a snapshot that allows them to slot your dog into their dog boarding schedule without guessing. Mention triggers, food guarding, separation anxiety signs, and whether your dog is comfortable being handled by unfamiliar people.

If your dog has a strict routine — for example, two 20-minute walks at set times — include that. Some facilities have flexible schedules, others run structured shifts. When you compare facility selection, ask how rigid their schedule is and whether they can accommodate your dog's needs. Flexibility often affects boarding pricing, because custom schedules require more staff time.

Grooming, toileting, and presentation Bathe your dog the day before departure if they tend to pick up dirt. A clean dog helps staff, especially during holiday boarding when many dogs are in [Hiphounds](#) close contact. Trim nails beforehand; long nails create noise and can stress both your dog and neighbors. If your dog is prone to skin issues, add a note about preferred shampoos or topical treatments.

For toileting, provide pee pads only if your dog uses them at home. Otherwise, large facilities prefer outdoor eliminations. If you are sending pads, label how often to change them. Bring small, sealed bags of treats you use for potty training or crate settling; many facilities do not want unsealed food items scattered in the supply area.

Crate and confinement considerations If your dog uses a crate at home and does better with one, check whether the facility allows personal crates. Many boarding centers provide standard kennels and do not permit outside crates for safety or infection control reasons. If you bring a crate, it should be airline-approved, sturdy, and labeled with your dog's name. Plan for how security and sanitation will be handled; some facilities require that personal crates be collapsible or have removable bedding.

When evaluating facility selection, ask whether dogs are crated when unsupervised, how many dogs share playgroups, and whether there are quiet rooms for dogs that need downtime. Dogs that do not tolerate large playgroups may do better with individual exercise and human attention, which can affect boarding pricing since it requires one-on-one time.

Holiday and long term boarding tips Holiday boarding fills quickly. Book early and reconfirm three to five days before your departure. Holiday boarding often means higher staffing needs, different holiday hours, and potential surcharge fees. If you need pick-up or drop-off outside regular hours, ask about after-hours policies and prices.

For long term boarding beyond a week, consider leaving additional items and a change in food: more bedding, extra toys, and larger medication supplies. Long term boarding magnifies small gaps — a single missing feeding instruction becomes a week of altered diet. Ask about discounts for extended stays and whether billing is prorated daily or weekly. Sometimes facilities that advertise lower base rates add fees for things like additional walks, picking up medication, or special feeding. Compare facility selection by asking for a sample invoice so you can anticipate boarding pricing more accurately.

Handling separation anxiety Separation anxiety can surface during a week away even in dogs who manage fine for a weekend. Pack calming aids only if they work for your dog. This might mean a Thundershirt, a pheromone diffuser, or a small bottle of a vet-approved supplement. Do not send prescription sedatives without explicit instructions and prior agreement from the facility; many require veterinary oversight and will charge for administration.

Prepare staff with signs of severe anxiety: repeated pacing, self-harm, excessive panting, or refusal to eat. Ask whether staff can provide extra human interaction or quiet time. If your dog requires a predictable dog boarding schedule for calming, document that schedule clearly and request confirmation that staff can accommodate it. For dogs with chronic anxiety, consider a short trial stay to observe how they handle separation and the facility environment.

Labeling and presentation Label everything. Write your dog's name, your name, and a phone number on food bags, medication, toys, and bedding. Use a permanent marker or printed labels that hold up to handling. If you have multiple pets boarding, color-code items or include pet names prominently to prevent mix-ups.

Pack items in a single durable tote or duffel that staff can move easily. Avoid heavy luggage with broken zippers. A soft tote keeps everything accessible at drop-off and reduces the time staff spend hunting for notes and items, which is especially valuable during holiday boarding peak times.

Common edge cases and how to prepare for them If your dog is negative for vaccines but has a history of exposure risks, discuss alternative arrangements like isolated quarters. If your dog is on a rotating medication schedule keyed to odd or even days, create a clear dosing calendar. For dogs that foam at the mouth with high stress, list calming strategies and avoid sending high-value toys that might trigger possessive behavior.

If your dog is large and vomits when stressed, bring paper towels and a plastic container of a bland food the facility can use temporarily. For dogs with solar sensitivity or skin conditions that require shade, ask about kennel location and whether staff can move them inside during the hottest hours. Many facilities will accommodate but it can affect boarding pricing if additional attention or relocation is required.

Practical drop-off day routine Arrive just before a scheduled quiet time if possible; mid-morning is often busy. Leave at least 20 minutes for intake: staff need to review forms, go over medication instructions, and observe your dog's behavior. Use this time to demonstrate any tricky behaviors, show collar buckles, and point out medical quirks.

Give the intake staff a short, calm goodbye. Prolonged exits can increase anxiety. If your dog takes a while to settle, ask whether the facility offers a short introductory session or socialization time. For holiday boarding, confirm pick-up dates and times, and reconfirm any after-hours fees.

Final practical checklist of pre-departure tasks

- reconfirm reservation and hours with the facility, especially for holiday dates.
- update and print vaccination records and any veterinary clearance forms.
- portion food, label medications, and prepare a one-page behavior schedule.
- pack one familiar scent item and a limited number of washable toys.

- leave emergency contacts, vet information, and written consent for care.

After the stay: what to check When you pick up your dog, do a quick health check. Look for discharge from ears or eyes, check paws and nails, and monitor stool for a day or two. Ask staff for notes on food intake, playgroup interactions, and any medications given. Facilities should provide a summary of your dog's behavior and any incidents, plus receipts that break out services. Compare the boarding pricing on your invoice to the estimate and raise any discrepancies immediately.

A few realistic trade-offs Bringing everything comforts you and your dog but adds clutter and risk of loss. Facilities often prefer minimal, labeled items. Sending the original food bag is ideal, but portioned bags are practical for busy days. Choosing a small, familiar bedding piece reduces stress and keeps laundering straightforward. Expect that elevated service, individualized schedules, and medical administration will increase boarding pricing. If cost is a concern, agree on a basic package for the week and add optional services if needed once you return.

Choosing the right facility matters more than any single item you pack A well-run facility will guide you through a packing list, accept your documents by email before arrival, and clarify boarding pricing and policies. Visit in person when possible, ask to see staff-to-dog ratios, and check how they handle emergencies. For holiday boarding, inspect their holiday staffing plan and pick-up windows. For long term boarding, meet the manager and request a written care plan.

Packing thoughtfully reduces stress, saves money, and keeps your dog closer to their routine while you are away. The checklist and routines here cover the situations I see most often in week-long stays: medication complications, feeding mistakes, and anxiety-related behaviors. Pack light, label everything, and prioritize items that carry scent and routine. With that approach, your dog is likely to come home tired, fed, and ready for a long hello.

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