

# Eco-friendly Salt Alternatives for Melting Ice and Snow

Welcome to December. Winter will soon be upon us and as we head to our local hardware store and supermarket to pick up shovels, snow machines, and salt, we can do our part to be more environmentally conscious about our purchasing decisions. We know that salt is a great product for melting ice and snow, but did you know that there can be a negative effect on the environment? Most of the conventional salts we purchase contain ingredients such as Urea, potassium nitrate, sodium chloride, and baking soda. Road salt, the most common, known as sodium chloride is in most of the salts that we purchase. It is inexpensive to produce and it is effective. But, it's bad news for our pets whose paws can get irritated and cause chemical burns. If ingested, while licking their paws or your salty shoes it can lead to mouth burns and gastrointestinal issues such as vomiting and diarrhea. That salt can also wreak havoc on concrete, eroding our driveways, walkways, sidewalks, and stairs. It can also damage our plants and lawns, disturbing the PH levels needed for them to thrive. And as that salt melts over the course of Winter and Spring, it dissolves easily from roads and parking lots into the sewers, and then into our creeks, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. Wildlife, who drink from these water sources, and fish who live in these rivers and creeks are all impacted by the rising salt levels.

While budget-friendly and necessary for major roadways, we can do our part to reduce the effects in our local communities. Here are some environmentally friendly ice melt alternatives that are kinder to the environment. Some even are pet friendly.

## **Organic Salt-free Deicer (less toxic and corrosive)**

It can be a little pricier than salt, but these products will also help to keep your walkways and driveways ice-free. Look for products labeled as "pet-safe". They often contain ingredients such as **calcium magnesium acetate**, **potassium chloride**, or **calcium chloride** (CaCl<sub>2</sub>). When these less toxic de-icing products

dissolve and run off with the snowmelt, the minerals they contain can *fertilize* the plants they come into contact with. Some of these products can be applied right before a snowstorm to help prevent the build-up of ice and snow. And they are non-corrosive, so they will not harm walkways and stairs.

### **Pickle Brine (waterway friendly)**

The brine from pickling helps to melt ice and snow. National Geographic claims it is better for the environment than salt, as it prevents ice from sticking to the road which makes it easier to remove. Pickle brine use means that 4 to 29 percent less chlorine is added to our waterways.

You can make your own brine recipe by mixing 2 lbs. of salt per gallon of water. Add a glass of sugar beet juice to get the ultimate de-icer. The sugar in the beet juice might make it more appealing to pets. Limit your pets' access to eating snowmelt or the product directly.

### **Sand, ash from the fireplace, coffee grinds, alfalfa meal**

Sprinkle these over your icy surfaces to provide traction and the darker colors will absorb more heat and help to melt snow and ice.

These are effective natural environmentally friendly ice melters. They are 100% natural. Alfalfa meal and sand are grainy and will provide traction and is effective when used in moderation.

### **Sugar Beet Juice**

The juice from sugar beets lowers the melting point of ice and snow which helps to clear your driveway. It's even been used to melt ice and snow on municipal roads in some areas. It's safe for animals, people, metals, concrete, and plants.

You can add salt to it to make it more effective, however, it then can cause corrosion and pet issues. See pickle brine above.

**Shoveling (the most environmentally safe way to keep paths open)**

Do not underestimate the importance of shoveling. Shoveling is an extremely environmentally friendly and green way to get rid of your icy bits this winter. Choose a shovel with a back-saving design for snow moving. Choose one with a firm straight edge for the final clearing. Garden shovels are useful for chipping ice.

No matter what your choice, you should wash your pets' feet to ensure their feet do not get irritated by the de-icers and they don't digest them when they lick their feet. Do your best to avoid mushy snow on cold days when you walk your pets because you probably do not know the de-icer used. More information on pet safety and ice can be found at <https://www.asPCA.org/news/keeping-pets-safe-during-winter-dangers-ice-melts>