



Choosing the Right Deicer This Winter

Many people use deicers, or ice melts, to keep their walks and driveways safe and usable during bad weather. It is important to realize, however, that these products can be harmful to pets (i.e., paws), plants, and the surfaces to which they are applied. Before buying any product, do your research and read the label. Look at performance, cost, and how well it works. Performance is a function of how quickly, how long, and at what temperature the product works best.

Most commercially available ice melts are composed of naturally occurring minerals; i.e., blends of sodium chloride, calcium chloride, or magnesium, all salts. **Sodium chloride** (rock salt), one of the most common and least expensive products, works well at temperatures below 25°F, but is harmful to pets, wildlife, and plants, and highly corrosive to steel, concrete, and mortar. **Calcium chloride** works quickly, lasts longer, works at temperatures below 25°F, and is less harmful to animals and plants. **Magnesium chloride** works well and quickly to about 5°F, and it is less harmful to animals and plants than calcium chloride. **Calcium magnesium acetate**, a patented product that is a combination of dolomitic lime and acetic acid, is the most environmentally friendly deicer. It works well at 5°F, lasts longer (fewer applications are needed), has low toxicity to animals and plants, causes less corrosion, and is biodegradable.

When purchasing deicers, notice that many products do not provide information on their packaging. Most are a mix of the chemicals referenced above with no information on proportions. A product called **NATURE'S ICE MELT™** is 98% rock salt. It should be called "Rock Salt" and not include the reference to nature. Because a product is called **Safe Paw™** does not guarantee that it is safe for paws if you can't tell what's in the product. **Green Gobbler Pet Safe Ice Melt™** claims to be 100% magnesium chloride, but is it? **MAG CHLORIDE™** ice melt is 50% magnesium chloride, not 100% as implied.

Your first priority should be to **use these products sparingly!** Purchase a bag of sand along with the deicer and mix them. Deicers should make it easier to shovel rather than replace the need to shovel. Less product means lower cost and less damage.