

Guide to Adopting a Pet

So, you've decided to add another family member? Going to a shelter or rescue group? Super! Lots of great, wonderful animals can be found at shelters or rescue groups throughout the country. The key to finding the right animal for your family is to do some homework before you go looking. This is to help insure you are not emotionally drawn to the wrong animal.

Dog, Cat or something else? :

- Dogs take more daily time than cats. They must be walked, taken to training classes (even older dogs can learn new tricks!), brushed and exercised daily. They are pack animals and thrive on your companionship so if you work more than 8 or 9 hours a day or travel a lot, consider a different species.
- Cats on the other hand require less time but none the less, do require attention. Daily, cats need their litter box cleaned, interactive exercise, some require grooming and all require some weekly if not daily, lap time.
- Small animals that require cages also take time on a daily basis. Their habitats must be cleaned regularly, they may require exercise outdoors or toys that provide them an opportunity to burn some calories.
- Large animals such as horses, pigs, goats etc require large outdoor shelters, fenced fields and access to fresh water at all times. And in the case of goats extra security measures and vigilance as they are known escape artists!

Consider physical aspects.

- Long haired pets must be brushed daily or require frequent trips to the groomers. Sure they may feel luxurious under your hand and look very handsome, but look beyond that and imagine the amount of hair that will be left to decorate the house. Short hair is that, shorter hair but don't be fooled by the old "won't shed" aspect. Very few breeds of dogs or cats truly don't shed. You will have hair in the house. And speaking of that, all pets belong indoors with their families. Both dogs and cats do much better mentally if allowed indoors, including sleeping indoors at night. Resolve to live with your pet, not keep him as an "outsider!"
- Don't forget that all animals need some type of daily grooming - even snakes and lizards need to have something to rub off their old skin on.

Adults vs. youngsters:

- Sure kittens and puppies are adorable but they can cause some real frustrations while growing up. Puppies must be thoroughly socialized to as many different people, places, things and noises as possible within the first five months of life. If canines are not socialized early enough in their lives they become fearful and most serious behavior problems stem from fear. Puppies must be taken to training classes at an early age (12 weeks) so they develop proper habits and get supervised play with their peers. Puppies must be housetrained and supervised 100% of the time until they are trustworthy adults.
- Don't think you are off the hook with kittens either. Kittens also need to be socialized. They need plenty of playtime with you and with strangers as well. Kittens will scratch on the furniture, may taste test every plant in the household and knock things off the counter to name only a few problems. Kittens are easier to houstrain than most puppies but they also can have problems in this area; especially if you are not committed to keeping their litter box clean and in a quiet, easily accessible location within your household.
- Both puppies and kittens are troublesome; chewing, scratching, and vocalizing. This is part of their developmental process. Be ready to commit extra time, patience and love to these youngsters. If your commitment to supervision, socialization and gentle, humane guidance and training is high, the payoff can be great. But just remember that your pet will be an adult for a far longer time than a cute, adorable youngster. If you don't like the adult version for some reason (too much hair, too aloof, too whatever) than don't get a puppy or kitten just because it is soooooo cute now.

- Adults on the other hand generally housetrain quickly as they have the physical capacity to hold off elimination for longer periods. Adults two years and older generally have outgrown chewing and other destructive behavior. However, they also may come with existing behavior problems such as separation anxiety, scratching on furniture, spraying or escape behaviors. Temperament is harder to mold with adults. If an adult animal you are looking at is shy, chances are he will remain shy unless you enlist the help of a professional who can work with you on positive behavior modification.
- Don't forget that no matter how cute the youngster is - they are a lot of work. And every species has special needs when they are young that they don't have when older. Read up on the care of the creature of your choice before bringing home baby!

Amount of \$\$:

- Especially with some breeds of dogs and cats, a groomer may be required at frequent intervals to avoid mats and tangles. Training for your new dog should be very high on your priority list. Studies have shown that dogs who receive some type of formal training have relatively fewer behavior problems than their counterparts. Training also helps you and your new friend bond quickly. So set aside at least one hundred dollars for one 6 to 8 week course (for puppies count on taking at least two courses within the first year of ownership). Puppies housetrain faster and easier using the crate method (crates cost anywhere from \$30.00 up depending on size). Adult dogs can benefit from crate training as well and it may be a tool that your local rescue group or humane society requires.
- Think that cats may be cheaper than dogs? Think again. Indoor cats tend to live longer than most dogs therefore requiring litter (for their lifetime!), toys and scratching posts that will have to be replaced over the years. The initial money you invest in "cat equipment" during a cat adoption is generally less than dog equipment but it does catch up in the long haul!
- Larger animals such as horses will also cost more - they eat more, require more space and you have a larger clean up job to do.
- Exotic species also will require specialized care - and vets costs will most likely be higher as you may have to travel some distance to find a clinic that deals with such animals.

Breeds versus Your Lifestyle:

- Is your household active and busy? Do you want a jogging companion or a couch potato? Do you want relatively few demands and just something to pet but not walk? Do you like a take charge kind of pet or a precious daisy type? Research breeds carefully before adopting any purebred or mixed breed. Each breed has different behavior tendencies; some of those tendencies may not match well with your lifestyle. In dogs, terriers love to bark and dig; Huskies and Malamutes have endless energy but don't do well in warm climates. Siamese cats are tend to be more vocal and active than other breeds.
- Take a trip to the library and research some possible breeds. Talk to breeders, go to cat or dog shows. Pick out two to three different breeds or mixed breeds that will fit your family lifestyle and needs.

In the long run it doesn't matter what type of animals you share your home with - you need to prepare yourself, family members and your home for the new pet. Careful research and talking to other owners will help you make that final decision.