

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.

Dogs vs. Cat:

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 nonetheless, 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.

Consider physical aspects.

Long-haired pets must be brushed daily or require frequent trips to the groomer. 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!"

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 housetrain 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.

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!

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 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.

Children:

Some breeds of both dogs and cats are known to be better with children than others. If you have children in your immediate family or children/grandchildren that visit, be doubly cautious about picking the right animal for you. Most aggression in a family pet is directed at children. Adopt a breed of pet that is known to be tolerant and more importantly, look carefully at the individual animal's behavior. In turn, teach your children to handle your family pet gently and with respect. Any child 12 years or under needs to have 100% supervision when with the family pet.

When at the shelter or rescue group, put your color & cuteness blinders on:

Color and cuteness has nothing to do with behavior. Most people can live with black or orange or white hairs but few can live with dangerous behavior problems such as aggression. Look at more than one animal; don't fall in love with the very first one you get to interact with. Be picky! Bring your children, spouse, roommate or anyone who is in the same household that will be interacting with the pet. If you have grandchildren, bring them to meet the prospective pet. Don't adopt an animal because it is so shy it won't come to you and you feel bad for it; these animals need professional help. Are you willing to commit the time needed to rehab an animal like this and have the financial capability (meaning hire a professional) to help them? Be honest with yourself and what you can handle in your household. Go to several different shelters and rescue groups before you make that final decision. Remember, a pet is for a lifetime, not just for a holiday or birthday so choose wisely.