

Responsible Pet Ownership

Welcoming a new pet into a household can be an exciting event for many reasons. Perhaps we look forward to the companionship of a loyal friend, the security a pet may offer, having a playmate for another pet, or an exercise partner for yourself, etc. However, with pet ownership comes a big commitment and responsibility to love and care for the new addition so that this new adventure is a positive experience.

Before obtaining a new pet it is wise to think about and plan for how we will best care for our pet so that they have a good long quality life. Careful planning before obtaining a new pet is the first critical step in becoming a responsible pet owner. Planning for future costs, the type of pet that best fits your personality and availability, and future social and activity needs of the pet you choose will help to make for a smoother transition.

Based on statistics from a major pet insurance carrier, it costs about \$2,000/year to house a dog and \$1,300/year for a cat, depending on the breed and owner expectations. Therefore, careful planning for the needs of the breed chosen and your own circumstances is vital to ensure that all parties have a positive experience.

Basic costs that need to be considered include: food, bedding, toys, housing, training/behavior classes, grooming, bathing, leashes, collars, licensing, and veterinary care. All of these costs start to add up depending on the needs of each pet and the owner's expectations for that pet.

The first step involves picking the right pet. There are many published checklists and programs that can walk a new owner through picking the right pet for them. It is worth the time and effort to be thorough in this initial step to increase the chances the new association will work for both parties.

One of the most important responsibilities a pet owner assumes is for the emotional and psychological well-being of the pet. Dogs are, by nature, pack animals with a social hierarchy. They thrive on the social interaction that comes with a pack and need continual love and attention. If a new owner's schedule is so busy with work, outside social life, or travel, then behavior problems tend to escalate. One of the main reasons for pet abandonment and homelessness is an unwanted behavior problem, such as inappropriate urination or destructive behavior as a result of separation anxiety. Cats tend to be more solitary than dogs, but most still enjoy the interaction with the humans in the home to varying degrees, and they deserve to have that offered and available.

Responsible pet ownership also includes regular veterinary care to ensure a happy and long life. This includes having your pet spayed (female) or neutered (male) to prevent roaming and prolific reproducing that can occur with dogs and cats, which often leads to an increase in homeless pets and/or shelters filled with animals seeking adoption. In addition, other vital care includes: regular vaccinations to prevent disease, good nutrition to prevent the effects of obesity, consistent exercise, and regular exams, blood panels and teeth cleanings to catch diseases early and help prevent other problems that may cause pain and illness, or shorten the life of the pet.

In summary, responsible pet ownership involves careful and detailed planning prior to purchasing and bringing home any new pet. As owners follow a carefully laid out plan there will be fewer unwanted or abandoned pets and both pet and owner will have a lifetime of experiences that will be positive and rewarding.

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