

While most family pets are cats and dogs, other animals can be wonderful additions to your home. Rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, bunnies, birds and fish can make great family pets as long as they receive the specialized care they need. Even though these animals are smaller than a cat or dog, they require just as much attention and care. Before you go out looking for a pet, you need to do your homework for the animals sake. Too many people bring home pets with very little thought about the future only to find out that they don't want it because it's too much work, can't handle it because it takes up too much of their time, it doesn't get along with their other pets or children or their landlord won't let them keep it and take the pet back or it ends up homeless in a shelter. Animals have feelings too...Please, Please, Please Think BEFORE You Act!

Your job is to make sure that a pet will "fit" into your life and then identify the best pet for your living space, lifestyle and budget. Take time, involve the family and answer the following questions that Only You can answer Before pet shopping.

Why do I want a pet?

Is it a good time for me to adopt a pet?

Can I provide proper lodging?

If renting, does my landlord permit pets?

Are my living arrangements suitable for the pet that I have in mind?

Do I have room for the pet and their necessities?

Will I be able to lodge the pet in the future?

Can I afford my pets cost?

Good Nutritious Food

Vet costs

Possible medical emergencies

Supplies

Pet Sitter

Groomer

Am I prepared to deal with special problems that a pet can cause?

Do I have time to dedicate to my pet of choice?

Will my new pet fit into the activities that I enjoy?

What kind of pet is right for me?

Will my pet fit in with the rest of my family?

Are my children old enough?

Will my pet be good with my future children/grandchildren?

Does anyone in my home or having regular contact with my pet have allergies?

Who will care for my pet when I am not available?

Finally, am I prepared to keep and care for the pet for his or her entire lifetime?

Sure, it's a long list of questions, but a quick stroll through an animal shelter will help you understand why answering them before you adopt is so very important. Read each question, think about it and answer it honestly. Many of the shelters homeless animals are puppies and kittens, victims of people who irresponsibly allowed their pets to breed. But there are at least as many dogs and cats at the shelter who are more than a year old, animals who were obtained by people who didn't think about the responsibilities of pet ownership before they brought it home. Please, don't make the same mistake! Be Responsible! Think before you adopt! Sharing your life with a companion animal can bring incredible rewards, but only if YOU are willing to make the necessary commitments of time, money, responsibility and love for the life of the pet that you choose.

Which pet is right for You? Are you a dog, a cat or a something else person? Most people choose either a cat or dog but do not count out having both. If you want a pet to go with you and be your best friend, consider a dog. If you don't mind being ignored from time to time, a cat might be your choice. If you want the best of both worlds, why not have both? It is very possible to have both a cat and dog living in the same home and peacefully. If you choose a pet other than a cat or dog, you really must consider who will take care of the pet when you are not available. Most Pet Sitters do not have a problem with fuzzy pets like guinea pigs and hamsters but when you have mice, a spider, a snake or some other non-fuzzy critter, then

attitudes may change. Make sure to check your local pet sitters to see if they will accommodate your particular choice of pet. Before choosing an exotic pet, check your laws both locally, then on the state and federal level. There is nothing worse than having your beloved pet taken from you because of a law.

Next, you must decide purebred or mixed breed. The only significant difference between the two is that purebreds, because their parents and other ancestors are all members of the same breed, generally conform to a specific 'breed standard'. This means that you have a good chance of knowing what general physical and behavioral characteristics a puppy or kitten of that breed is likely to have. The size, appearance and temperament of most mixed breeds can be predicted as well. After all, mixed breeds are simply combinations of different breeds. So if you can recognize the ancestry of a particular mixed breed dog or cat, you can see how a puppy or kitten is likely to look as an adult.

Some people think that because they spend a lot of money to purchase a purebred, they are getting a guarantee of health and temperament, too. This is simply not true. The Only thing the "papers" from purebred dog and cat registry organizations certify is that the recording registry maintains information regarding the reported lineage and identity of your pet.

Mixed breeds offer several advantages that prospective pet owners may fail to consider. For example, when you adopt a mixed breed, you get the benefit of two or more different breeds in one animal. You also get a pet who is less prone to genetic defects common to certain purebred dogs and cats plus you get a lot of love for a lot less money. There are soooo many great animals in shelters just begging for a home and someone to share love. There's only one problem with adopting a pet from an animal shelter, the selection may be overwhelming and you will have to control the urge to bring them all home!

If a cat is your choice, go to <http://www.petmd.com/cat/breeds> to find information regarding all the different cat breeds. They also have information regarding the proper care and information to help you keep you cat healthy and happy. Every cat is a true individual, so it's important to take the time to choose the one who's right for you. Go to your local animal shelter and you'll notice that some cats meow for special attention, while others simply lie back and gaze at you with an air of superiority. There are as many different personalities of cats as there are cats in the shelter. Which disposition is best for you? Only you can decide. Regardless of individual personality, look for a cat who's playful, active, alert, and comfortable while being held and stroked. Ask an adoption counselor for assistance when you

wish to spend some time with individual cats. Keep in mind that because they are in an unfamiliar environment, some cats who are usually quite social may be frightened or passive while at the shelter. Finally, remember that you're making a commitment to love and care for your new pet for their lifetime, which could mean up to 20 years or more. Please choose very carefully and be a responsible pet owner. In no time at all, you'll know how wonderful sharing your home with a cat can be.

If a dog is your choice, go [http://www.akc.org/breeds/index.cfm?nav\\_area=breeds](http://www.akc.org/breeds/index.cfm?nav_area=breeds) and read about the different breeds. Find out exactly what to expect from the dog you choose. Is it a working, sporting, etc, general appearance, temperament, etc. For example, if you live in an apartment, a large dog would be a bad idea but also a beagle, because they love to bark.....a lot! If you have a house with lots of outdoor running room, a large dog is great but keep in mind, the larger the dog, the shorter the life span. Be aware of the life span of the breed that you choose and be prepared for a commitment for their lifetime. Go to your local shelter, keep in mind that it is a stressful place for any animal. Quite often, a dogs true colors won't show until he's away from other animals and the shelter environment. So even if you walk past a kennel with a dog who isn't trying to get your attention, don't count him out, he may just be a little scared or lonely. Ask an adoption counselor to help you select a dog who will match your lifestyle. Spend time with each animal. Make sure to make it a family thing. If you have a spouse, children or other pets, bring them along because you want to make sure that everyone is happy together.

For all other choices make sure you do the research Before deciding. Ferrets have a high metabolism and have lots of energy which makes them prone to sudden illnesses and accidents. They are Not a good pet if you don't want constant chaos in your home.

Hamsters are a favorite of ours. They are small, fuzzy and fun but they have a short life span, only two to three years.

Guinea Pigs live for about 3 to 6 years and are adorable but will tend to keep you awake at night if in the same room.

Bunnies are also quite loveable and soft. Their life span is approximately 10 years or more and are easy to care for.

As for the rest of the pet options (exotic), you are on your own to investigate thoroughly Before bringing them home. None of these pets are recommended if you have small children but if you do, make sure that you constantly supervise if they are "in charge" of the pets care. Children tend to loose interest and forget to feed or care for a pet after the novelty wears off and the pet will suffer the consequences.

Where to get your pet is, of course, your decision. You have already figured out that we recommend a shelter over a store. But, if you do go to a store or a breeder, check out their reputations. Find out exactly where the pet you are looking to adopt was born and how it was treated. If they can't or won't prove it, don't buy! There are still lots of puppy mills and disreputable pet stores that sell mistreated animals. If everyone stopped purchasing from them, the puppy mills would shut down...that is our dream that we pray will turn into reality. I made a bad decision when I was only 18, fresh out of high school, by purchasing the most adorable puppy from a farmers market. It died within two weeks of an intestinal disease that it had when purchased. There was absolutely nothing my vet could do. This was the first and last pet ever purchased except for our Cockatiel, a hamster and some mice that were purchased from a reputable pet store. All of our cats, dogs, hamsters, etc. have all been rescues or strays since then. One cat (we named Leroy) was even rescued when we stopped to get gas. There were a group of teenagers pouring gas on it and planning to set it on fire and watch! Fortunately, we were in the right place at the right time. It was so unbelievable, it still makes us shiver to think about it! Then there was the GrandDog (our first grandson). Eeyore (changed to Woogie) came to visit and we were blessed with his company for over 14 years and miss him tremendously.

The local place to check is <http://northumberlandcountyanimalshelter.weebly.com/>. If what you are looking for is not available at this location, try other shelters further away. We have people come from out of state all the time because they are looking for a specific breed. Waiting is also an option, let the adoption counselor aware of what you are looking for and have them call you. New animals are coming in almost every day.

Bringing home your new pet is such a great day but there are a lot of things to do before they arrive. Once you get to know them better, you will be able to purchase items that they really like but you will need some essentials to get started making them feel at home.

For Cats you will need dishes, a litter pan and litter (there are lots of styles of both to choose from), carrier for transporting, bed, grooming tool, toys, scratching pads or post, age appropriate nutritious food and treats. Keep in mind that most cats have selective taste. Buy only small sizes of food and treats until you figure out their likes and dislikes. If your cat is going to be strictly indoors, a collar and I.D. tag is not absolutely necessary but recommended. If someone opens the door and they slip out...well, hopefully it will not happen but it is best to be prepared. If you bring home a kitten and they have never explored the outdoors, they are quite

content to stay indoors. If you get a older cat that has had access to the great outdoors, the longing never goes away. They will always look for that opportunity to 'escape'.

For Dogs you will need a collar, leash, I.D. tag, dishes, bed, crate, grooming tools, toys...especially chewing toys if a puppy, age appropriate nutritious food and treats....lots and lots of treats. A crate is not a cage or a form of punishment and should never be used as one. Make sure you put a comfy bed (or a soft towel until they stop chewing) and a chew toy (Nylabone, Kong filled with treats, etc.) that should always be inedible and large enough to prevent from being swallowed. Crates come in handy for three reasons. First, to transport your puppy safely. You wear a seat belt to keep safe in case of an accident and so should your dog. If you don't want to crate them, get a harness and you can seat belt them but never let your pet roam free in a moving vehicle for your safety and theirs. Second, if you bring home a dog that is not potty trained, a crate is an effective housebreaking tool. Dogs will not eliminate where they sleep so the crate will help until they are trained and can also help to reduce separation anxiety, to prevent destructive behavior (such as chewing furniture) and to keep a puppy away from potentially dangerous household items (i.e. poisons, electrical wires, etc.). Third, dogs are den oriented animals and a crate can be their den when they have a need of a security blanket. Note; Do not allow children to play in your dogs crate or to handle your dog while they are in the crate. The crate is your dogs private sanctuary.

For all others, check with your local pet shop for specialty items that they will need besides their containment, food and water.

Final Thoughts before making that decision, make sure the pet you choose is the one you will be committed to Before you take them home. We were the third (and final) ones to adopt Garrett. By the time he was only three months old, he had been shifted around so much it was sad. This is not fair to the animal! They go wherever you take them. You are the one in charge...PLEASE be responsible!