

Appropriate Care of your Dog and Cat

Dogs and cats make wonderful pets, but only if we humans do our part to ensure a successful relationship.

All pets require health care

That means annual check-ups and vaccines at your veterinarian, and appropriate care and follow-up for illnesses or injury. If you cannot afford ongoing health care for your animal, then do not adopt a pet until you can afford this needed expense. It is as simple as that.

All dogs and cats need to be spayed/neutered

Even animals confined indoors or by fencing can occasionally get free. Ensure that your pet does not contribute to the huge animal overpopulation besetting us. You will find your neutered pet more comfortable over the long term and less distracting in their attempts to mate.

Only adopt a pet who has been spayed or neutered

Reliable animal shelters insist upon this service. After all, it is a SC state law. A vet would be happy to assist if he or she has animals available.

Know your animal source

You will be more likely to adopt a healthy animal by dealing with reputable shelters, veterinarians, well-established pet stores, or reputable dealers, than through want ads or via strangers. Young puppies and kittens are vulnerable to many illnesses not readily apparent to the non-professional. Only deal with those sources that take precautions to ensure healthy animals for public adoption. Once again, your best bets are reputable shelters, veterinarians, well-established pet stores, and reputable dealers.

A financial tip—acquire a pet who has received all its basic inoculations. All the sources mentioned above offer pets that have received their needed shots.

Make an appropriate adoption

Cute little baby pigs grow up to be 300-600 pound adult eating-machines. Small and happy puppies can grow into large dogs with aggressive personalities. Tropical parrots acquired by a middle-aged couple can easily outlive its human companions. And playful kitties can scratch, not only you, but also the antique sofa in your living room.

Think about your lifestyle and needs when you consider adopting a pet. Think about the adult space and activity needs of your desired animal. What is your home and yard like? If you get a dog, can you provide appropriate fencing to keep him/her at bay? What kind of landscaping do you have in the enclosed area? Are there plants that you care about that can be harmed by your pet's play? Are there plants poisonous to your pet in your yard?

If you cannot meet the needs of a pet, you need to re-think the adoption or the breed or specific animal you are thinking of adopting.

Have you taken climate into account? Our near sub-tropical summers necessitate special considerations and care of pets. Think twice about getting dogs bred for Alpine or northern climes. South Carolina is just not a good fit for such pets unless

you provide special accommodations, like access to air conditioning.

Always provide a fenced-in animal with a water source, shade and appropriate shelter. To do otherwise is inhumane. Creature comforts are critical for your pet's physical and emotional well-being.

Your pet's psychological needs also warrant consideration. Are you away from home frequently for business or pleasure? If so, rethink whether you should get a pet. Pets require human companionship. It's companionship that attracts us to our animal friends. If you cannot give a pet the time it deserves, then do not get one.

Regarding cats...consider them indoor pets. People who let their cats (neutered or spayed) roam outdoors unleash havoc and death on the wild creatures that inhabit even suburban landscapes. Songbirds, squirrels, rodents, rabbits, and small amphibians are highly vulnerable to the family cat. It may be warm and cuddly to you, but your cat, well-fed or not, is an efficient predator that kills instinctively. Cats on the prowl are also vulnerable. Dogs, automobiles and neighbors who do not like cats pose threats to your feline. If you treasure our natural world and value your pet's safety, keep your cat inside.

-The Board of the Animal Mission, 2001.