

# Pet Care



# Finding a Pet Sitter

Our furry friends are part of our family, but they can't always join us when we leave home for vacation or work travel.

Pet owners in these situations have a few choices, including boarding their pet or hiring a pet sitter. Both are great options, but increasingly, pet owners are going with pet sitters to watch their beloved animals.

## FINDING A PET SITTER

Start by asking friends and family whether they've used a pet sitter recently and whether they would recommend that person for your situation. You can visit professional pet-sitting organizations, such as the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters and the Pet Sitters International. Contact your veterinarian and local pet shelters, who may have employees who pet-sit, the Humane Society recommends.

## THE FIRST MEETING

Talk to potential pet sitters before hiring them to ensure they can answer all your questions thoroughly. Get a good idea of their personality and character. If possible, have them meet your pet, too. Pay attention to how they interact with them.

The Humane Society recommends asking:

- How long they've been in



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business.

- What their level of experience is with your pets' breed.
- What their backup plan is if they can't make it to your home.
- For a complete fee schedule.
- Are they comfortable, if

necessary, visiting the vet and administering medication?

- Do they have any special training or certifications?
- Are they bonded and insured? Get copies of their bonding and licensure paperwork, if applicable.
- For recommendations.

## KEEPING TABS

While you may be comfortable with the sitter you've hired, there are some additional steps to make sure your pets are being well taken care of. For instance, you can check a doorbell or security camera to make sure the sitter is

coming when they said they would. You can get a GPS for your pet to make sure they're being walked or let outside regularly. Have the sitter send texts or pictures when they visit so you can rest easy knowing your animals are being tended to.

# Grooming 101

Part of being a responsible pet owner is keeping them clean. Different pets have different needs, though. Some pets are pretty self-sufficient, while others need a more thorough groom, perhaps even by a professional.

## DOGS

At minimum, you should regularly brush and bathe your dog to keep them clean and free of parasites. Trimming their nails is also important; nails that are too long can make it difficult to walk and even lead to skeletal problems.

Rover recommends bathing short-haired dogs every 4-12 weeks depending on how oily their skin is. Dogs with oily skin may need more frequent washes. Long-haired, double-coated and silky-coated dogs should be bathed every 4-6 weeks. Wiry-coated dogs can wait 6-8 weeks. Dogs with curly or wavy coats should be bathed monthly.

Some dogs may need regular coat trims and some need regular ear cleanings. Floppy eared dogs, in particular, are vulnerable to ear infections and may need more regular cleaning.



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## CATS

Cats are famously fastidious and do a great job of cleaning themselves, but they may need a hand from time to time. If your cat is very dirty or gets into something sticky or stinky, they may need a bath. You should also regularly brush your cat to remove

dirt and dead hair and to improve the condition of their skin.

Check your cat's ears once a week for wax and dirt, the ASPCA advises, to keep infections at bay. Regularly check their paws and nails to make sure they're in good condition. Get your cat used to nail

trimmings at an early age and wrap them in a towel to minimize damage on both sides.

## BIRDS

Birds are also pretty good at keeping themselves clean. However, you'll still need to help them out to keep them healthy. Their nails, evolved to

help them grip a variety of surfaces in the wild, don't wear down as much in captivity. Choose perches to help keep them in check, but also be prepared to trim their nails yourself. For the first trim, take them to the avian vet and have them show you how to trim your birds nails yourself.

# Keeping Reptiles

Reptiles can be low-maintenance options for animal companionship and make great pets for the right person.

Here's what you need to know if you're considering getting a reptile for a pet.

## KNOW WHAT THEY EAT

Every reptile has a specific diet. Vetericyn Animal Wellness says there are four main types of reptile diets. Carnivores eat mostly meat, usually sourced from other animals such as mice and rats. Feed your carnivorous critters commercially sourced rodents to avoid passing on any potential diseases.

Insectivores eat mainly insects such as crickets, beetles, flies and worms. Herbivores eat fruits and vegetables, but you can supplement their diet with a commercially available food to make sure they get all their nutrients. Omnivores eat both vegetables and meat, but may prefer one over the other. Talk to your vet about the most healthful menu for your reptile.

## KNOW WHERE THEY LIVE

Your reptile's habitat at home should mirror their habitat in the wild. Vetericyn recommends controlling three main factors: heat, humidity and UVB light. Simulate a temperature gradient by attaching



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a heat source such as a basking lamp on one side of the enclosure so that your pet can self-regulate by moving to the warmer or cooler side of their home. Most reptiles need a humid, damp environment. Increase humidity by including a large water dish in a warm area of the cage, misting

regularly and purchasing the right substrate for your pet. UVB light helps reptiles to maintain a healthy immune system, Vetericyn says. Ultraviolet B light helps them produce hormones and synthesize vitamin D3 to build strong bones.

Keep your pet's environment

stable and consistent, away from direct sunlight. Make sure their cage is escape-proof with locking screen clips.

## HANDLING

Reptiles don't always enjoy cuddles like a dog or cat, but handling them is OK so long as it's done properly. Never leave

a reptile alone outside of its cage or with a child. Don't handle them while they're shedding — this can lead to irregular shedding patterns. Wash your hands before and after handling a reptile and avoid holding them up too high. A fall can injure fragile bones.

# Are Human Foods Safe for Dogs?

While we share our homes with our dogs, it may not always be good to share your plate.

Human food that we digest just fine can make your dog sick or even cause death. On the other hand, some human foods can provide health benefits, the American Kennel Club says. Always make sure their main diet is a commercially available dog food, which can provide them with the appropriate nutrition.

Here's what's safe to share with your furry friend.

**Bread:** Dogs can eat bread with no spices and no raisins. It doesn't really have any nutritional value, the AKC says. Homemade breads are better because commercially made breads usually contain preservatives.

**Cashews:** Unsalted cashews are OK, in moderation. The AKC says they contain calcium, magnesium, antioxidants and proteins, but too many can lead to weight gain.

**Cheese:** Dogs can have cheese in small quantities as long as they're not lactose intolerant. The AKC says to choose lower-fat varieties.

**Coconut:** The AKC says coconut is OK for dogs and contains lauric acid, which can help combat bacteria and viruses. It can help clear up bad breath and skin conditions. Coconut milk and



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coconut oil are also OK.

**Corn:** Corn is a top ingredient in dog food and is fine for dogs to eat. However, the cob can cause an intestinal blockage.

**Fish:** Dogs can eat fish, especially sardines and salmon, which are loaded with vitamins, protein and calcium. With the exception of sardines,

which have soft bones, make sure all other fish is deboned and fully cooked and cooled.

**Peanut butter:** Peanut butter is a great treat for dogs as it contains protein, heart-healthy fats and nutrients. The AKC says raw, unsalted peanut butter is best. Peanut butter shared with Fido should not contain xylitol, a sugar substi-

tute that can be toxic to dogs.

**Quinoa:** Quinoa is another grain that's sometimes found in dog food and is OK for dogs to eat. It's packed with nutrition that makes it a good alternative to corn, wheat and soy, common starches used in dog food.

**Turkey:** Dogs can have turkey if the fat, skin and bones

are removed. Any meat with salt, seasonings, garlic and onions should be kept on people plates.

**Yogurt:** Plain yogurt makes for a great snack for dogs if they can eat dairy. It can help their digestive system, but avoid any with added sugar and don't feed them any with artificial sweeteners.

# How to Find a Vet

From the first day you have your pet, you should have a good veterinarian to help maintain their health.

Choose a vet the same way you would choose another health care provider. Think about what's most important to you, the American Veterinarian Medical Association, such as location, hours, payment options and services.

## FINDING A VET

Start by asking friends and family who takes care of their pets. Ask them why they chose that vet. You can also ask breed clubs and special interest groups in your area; the people who run those groups may have strong relationships with certain vets that are familiar with your pet. Also look to your state or local veterinary medical associations.

## WHEN YOU MOVE

If you're looking for a new vet because you've moved, ask your current veterinarian whether they can recommend anyone in your new area. Then schedule a visit as soon as you can to establish care before it's an emergency.

## VISIT THE CLINIC FIRST

When choosing a practice, ask whether you can schedule a visit to meet with and discuss your pet. Ask about fees, services and payment policies. You may want to visit several



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clinics before making a decision, the AVMA says. Some questions to ask:

- What are the regular office hours? Will the practice accept e-mails or can appointments be made online?
- Who covers the practice when the regular veterinary staff is unavailable?
- Do they have an emergency practice or do they refer

to a local emergency clinic?

- What is the average wait time for a non-emergency appointment?
- Can you request an appointment with a specific veterinarian?
- Do they have pet insurance or do they accept your pet's insurance?
- Are payment plans available if you need them?

- Are any non-medical services available, such as boarding, grooming or training?

## WHAT TO BRING

You'll need to bring your pet's previous medical records with you, including any records of preventive care such as vaccinations, deworming and other procedures.

Bring records of illnesses, surgeries and medications, just like you would to a human health care professional.

Bring your pet, of course, and pay close attention to how the veterinarian and their staff interact with your pet. Watch to see whether they can make your pet comfortable in the office and that they handle them with care.

# Poison Control

Just like there's a human poison control hotline, the ASPCA maintains an Animal Poison Control Center.

It's staffed 24 hours per day, 365 days per year with experts to help owners keep their pets safe. The number to call is (888) 426-4435. Keep reading for some commonly ingested items and what to do.

## PLANTS

Any plant can make your pet sick. But there are some that are not good for any pet to have. If you believe your pet has ingested a poisonous plant, call your vet or the poison control number right away. Some common toxic plants are:

**For dogs:** Alocasia (elephant's ear), amaryllis, American holly, arum lily (calla lily, trumpet lily), begonias, boxwood, caladium, carnations, chrysanthemum, daisies, dracaena, foxgloves, gardenia, garlic, Hawaiian ti (snake plant), hosta, irises, jade plant, kalanchoe (mother-in-law plant), lavender, lemongrass, macadamia nut, marjoram, morning glory, moss rose (wild portulaca, purslane), oleander, oregano, paper whites, peace lily, philodendron, pothos, running myrtle (periwinkle, vinca), sago palm, schefflera (umbrella tree), tarragon, tomato plants, tulip, yucca.

**For cats:** Alocasia (elephant's ear), aloe, amaryllis, azalea, bay laurel (sweet bay), begonias, bird of paradise, caladiums, cape jasmine (gardenia), carnations, chamomile, chives, clematis, coleus, coontie palms, daffodils, dahlias, desert rose, dock (sorrel), foxglove, garlic, geranium, heavenly bamboo (nandina), hosta, hydrangea, irises, lavender, lilies, maidens breath (baby's breath), mint, nasturtium, parsley, peonies,

poinsettia, privet, shamrock plant (good luck plant, sorrel), St. John's wort, tulips, wisteria, yarrow, yew.

These are not comprehensive lists. Visit the ASPCA.org for more information, call your veterinarian or call the poison control hotline.

## HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

Pets can be harmed by cleaning products, human medications and cosmetics. These include:

**Bleach:** Clean pet enclosures and habitats with properly diluted bleach solutions, then rinse them and air thoroughly. Follow all label directions for any cleaning products and properly dispose of unused or dirty cleaning solutions and put away rags, mops or other implements out of pets' reach.

**Carpet fresheners and cleaners:** These should be OK in pet-friendly households so long as you keep your pet out

of contact with these products. Carpet freshener powder may cause sneezing or coughing. Shampoos may irritate skin.

**Essential oils:** Cats are especially sensitive to essential oils, the ASPCA says, with effects including gastrointestinal upset, nervous system depression or liver damage. Inhalation could lead to aspiration pneumonia in any animal. The ASPCA says it cannot recommend using essential oils in any pet-friendly area.



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# Aquarium Dos and Don'ts

Fish seem like a low-maintenance pet, but the care of an aquarium can quickly add up. Here are some dos and don'ts for keeping fish from the experts at Aqueon.

## DO

- Buy the largest aquarium you have space or budget for. Larger aquariums are more stable and easier to maintain, Aqueon says.

- Test the aquarium water for pH, ammonia and nitrite before adding fish.

- Change 10% of your aquarium water every week or 25% every two weeks. Replacement water should be the same temperature as aquarium water.

- Treat tap water with a water conditioner before adding it to the aquarium.

- Change filter cartridges at least once a month. Rinse them in between changes.

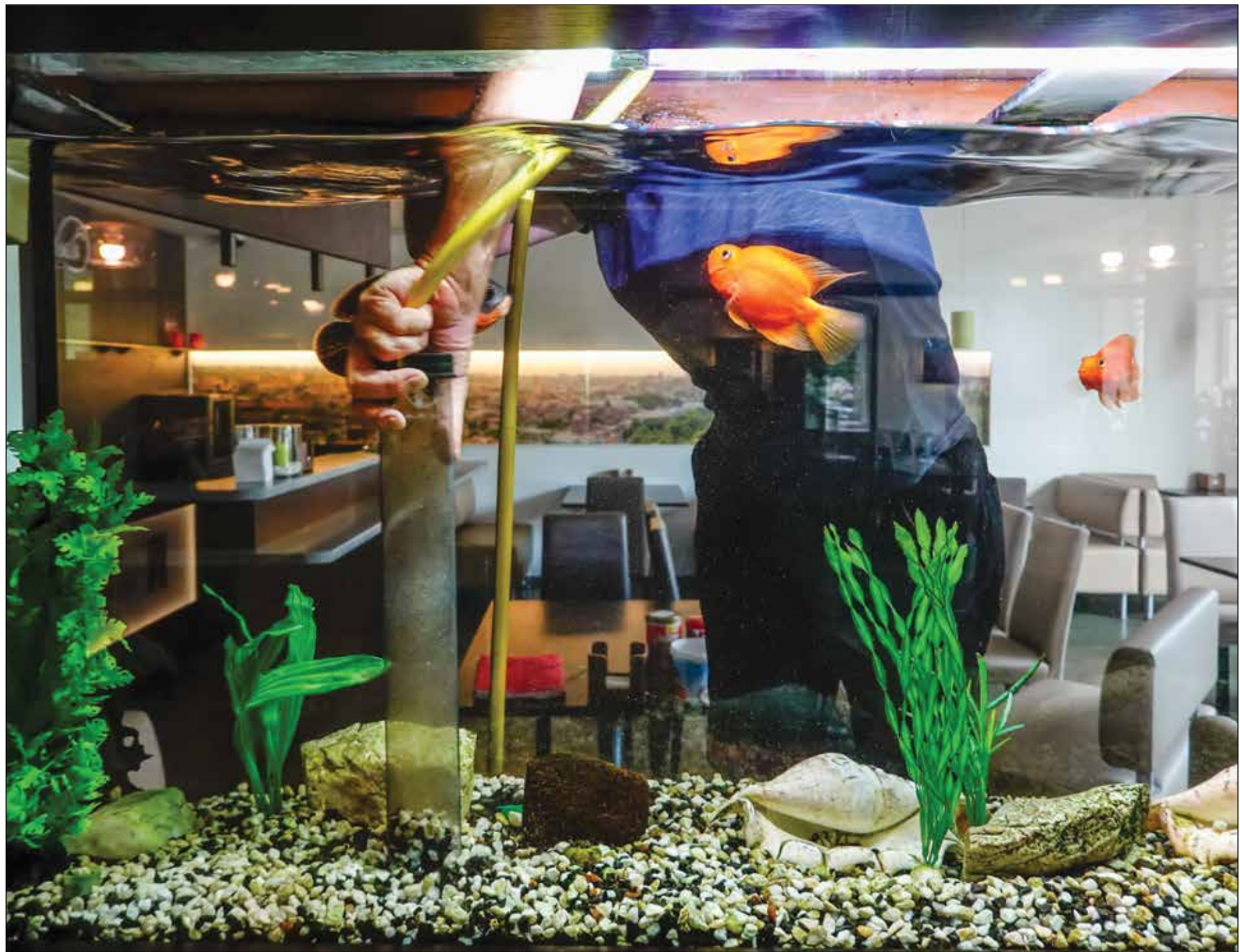
- Purchase schooling fish such as tetras, barbs and danios in groups of six or more.

- Inspect your fish when you feed them.

- Feed a variety of foods, such as flake, pellet and frozen foods to ensure they get proper nutrition.

## DON'T

- Tear down your aquarium completely to clean it. This can destroy the biological balance in your habitat.



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- Leave the aquarium light on all the time. This will stress out your fish and can cause excessive algae growth.

- Put your aquarium in a sunny or drafty location.

- Purchase fish on a whim. Research the species to make sure they won't outgrow your tank, are compatible with the

fish you already have, and that you have the right equipment to keep them healthy.

- Overstock your aquarium. Crowding leads to fights and water quality problems.

- Overfeed your fish. Feed only what they'll eat in under two minutes. Uneaten food can pollute the water and stress out

the fish.

Research aquariums and fish breeds before you make any purchases. Learn the maintenance requirements for the setup you want and make sure you can devote the appropriate time and resources to keeping your finned friends happy and healthy.

Talk to the experts at the pet store to see which fish they recommend for your skill level and which aquarium equipment brands they recommend. Don't buy based on price alone; factor in the replacement costs of inexpensive heaters, for example, versus a more expensive heater that may last longer.