

# PET ADOPTION GUIDE

Getting Ready for fido or fluffy!



# Contents

Introduction	3
Making the Big Decision	4
Questions to Ask Before Adopting	5
Deciding What Type of Pet is Right for You	8
Preparing for a Cat	10
Cat-Proofing	11
Cat Supplies	14
Preparing for a Dog	17
Dog-Proofing	18
Dog Supplies	21
Assemble the Team	25
Veterinarian	26
Training And Behavior Support	28
Pet Sitter	30
Estate Plan	30
Final Steps	31
Do a Trial Run	32
Finding a Shelter or Animal Rescue	33
Selecting a Pet	34
Paws4ever Resources	35

# Introduction

Thinking of expanding your family by four paws? Bringing home a new pet is a really exciting time, but it is also a big decision and a big commitment.

There are many things to consider when deciding whether you're ready to adopt and what type of pet is right for your home. Once you've decided to open your home to a new pet, what next? You'll need to pet-proof your home, shop for pet supplies, and make some key preparations.

In this guide, we'll walk you through the decision process, help you prepare for your new best friend, and guide you through the steps of finding the right pet.

Talk through the questions and steps in this guide with all the members of your household.

Adopting a pet is a lifelong journey, and Paws4ever is here for you every step of the way! Paws4ever is dedicated to creating and growing lifetime relationships between pets and people through adoption, training, education & care. Learn more at [paws4ever.org](https://paws4ever.org).

# Making The Big Decision



# Questions to Ask Before Adopting

## **Are you able to commit for the rest of the pet's lifetime?**

When you're thinking of adopting a pet, keep in mind the lifespan of the animal. Consider whether you're able to accommodate their needs not just in the near future, but potentially for years to come. This depends on the age, species, breed, and health of the animal. For a young cat or dog, this could be another 15 - 20 years! While no one can truly predict the future, think through any changes that could happen in your family and how those changes might impact your ability to care for an animal.

## **Are there possible household changes in your future?**

Is it likely that someone new could be moving in, like an elderly relative, a roommate, or a new partner? Is anyone in the household planning to have children? If so, make sure to choose a pet that could live with that person as well. If your mother-in-law is terrified of dogs, and might be coming to live with you in a few years, you may not want to adopt a large, energetic dog. If you're planning to have kids in a few years, consider whether your new pet is child-friendly.

## **Do you have frequent visitors to your house?**

Even if you don't have any other pets, if your best friend and her dog come to visit often, adopting a dog who doesn't get along with other dogs may present challenges. Hosting parties when you have pets also requires extra precautions. You'll need to create a safe, quiet space in the house for your pet during parties and ensure that they don't get out the door or snag any party food or alcohol that could make them sick.

## **How would a change of job affect your life?**

If your work hours change, would you be still be able to let your dog out to use the bathroom often enough? If you had a lower salary, could you still afford to care for your pet? If you had to move for your job, would you be able to take your pet?

## **Who would take responsibility for the pet if there was a breakup or move?**

It will be much easier for everyone if you have these "what-if" conversations ahead of time.

## **Are you prepared for the cost of caring for a pet?**

Last but not least, consider the costs of pet care. Between vet bills, food, supplies, pet sitters, dog walkers, training, and grooming, adopting a pet is a big financial commitment and will impact your household budget significantly.

Consider all the potential expenses, including those you might not think of as pet care, such as the cost of fencing in your backyard if needed. Keep in mind that your pet will likely need more veterinary care as they age. However, even a young pet may have emergency veterinary needs that arise. Saving money for unexpected pet care needs is always a good idea.

Here are some resources that can help you estimate the cost of caring for an animal:

[How Much Does A Dog Cost?](#)

[How Much Does A Cat Cost?](#)

# What Type of Pet Is Right For You?

Once you look into those adorable puppy or kitty eyes, all reason will go out the window. When you're standing in a shelter falling in love with an animal is not the time to decide whether you've got the right lifestyle for them. It is important to make a plan ahead of time and go to the shelter with a clear idea of what you're looking for.

Gather everyone in your household and ask each person to make a list. Have them to write down their must-haves, wants, and deal-breakers. This is a chance to work through any questions or conflicts among the family. If one of you wants a couch potato and the other wants a high energy runner, it will be much easier to compromise and make a decision about your ideal pet when it's still abstract, instead of waiting until you're at the shelter and have to decide between two real pets.

Discuss your must-haves, wants, and deal-breakers and compile them into a single list to bring with you to the shelter. Show your list to the shelter staff so they can introduce you to pets that will be a good match for your lifestyle.



The two most important traits to match to your family and lifestyle are energy level and temperament. Try not to get too hung up on looks, age, or breed, because these things don't really tell you whether an animal will do well in your home. Each animal is an individual and has their own personality and needs.

For example, if you have rambunctious kids, you may want a higher-energy, more confident pet who will enjoy playing with them rather than hiding in fear or getting annoyed when they run through the house. On the other hand, if you work long hours, you will probably want a pet who is comfortable resting quietly at home alone while you're gone, like a cat or a quieter dog.

Do you have other pets that the newbie will need to get along with? Make sure you add that to your must-haves list. Again, also consider future makeup of of your household. If someone new is likely to move in or if you're planning to have kids, you'll need to look for a pet compatible with your future lifestyle as well.

When you make your list, be sure to write down any questions you want to ask at the shelter, like "can he be left alone in the house?" "is she comfortable with children?" or "what is this pet's ideal home?" This will help ensure that you find a match that is right for both you and the pet.

Now that you know what kind of pet you're looking for, continue to page 10 to prepare for a cat or page 17 to prepare for a dog!



# Preparing for a Cat



# Cat-Proof Your Home

Kitties are famously curious creatures, and your new cat pal will start exploring your home right away. Before you bring your new cat home, take some time to make sure your home is a safe place for your feline friend using these tips.

Cats of all ages can be curious, playful, and have the athletic skills to get into lots of spaces in your home, so it is important to follow these guidelines for any cat. However, kitten-proofing may need to be more rigorous because kittens can fit into smaller spaces, are vulnerable to toxicity at lower amounts, and are far more playful. Assume that if they can get into something, they will!

## Plants

Cats may munch on houseplants, and many common household plants can be toxic to them. If you have houseplants, it is crucial to find out which plants are toxic. [Review this comprehensive guide to toxic and non-toxic plants.](#) If you have plants that are dangerous to cats, consider giving them to a friend, taking them to work, or keeping them in a place that your cat can't reach. Remember that your kitty may be quite athletic and able to climb onto tables, counters, and shelves.

## Foods

Some foods that are safe for humans are toxic to cats, but that won't stop your curious kitty from trying to steal a bite.

Chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, xylitol (a common sweetener in candy, gum, mints, and sugar-free foods), grapes, raisins, and yeast are some of the most common offenders. Make sure that you store your food in a place that your cat can't get to it, and do your research before giving any human food to your cat. Make sure that everyone in your household knows what foods are toxic to your kitty. It may be helpful to leave a list stuck to the refrigerator to remind everyone to be careful, especially while you're getting used to having a new family member.

For a more comprehensive list of potential poisons, check out the [ASPCA Animal Poison Control resources](#).

If you think your pet may have ingested a potentially poisonous substance, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control or your local emergency vet right away. Make sure you have these emergency numbers stored in your phone.

ASPCA Animal Poison Control: (888) 426-4435

## **Wires, Cords, and Strings**

Cats, especially kittens, might look at your power cords and phone chargers as awesome toys. Chewing power cords can cause electrocution, and tugging on a cord may cause a lamp or TV to fall over on them. Try to hide cords using cord management tools, or tuck them safely behind furniture.

You may also need to hide shoelaces, drawstrings, and even string-based toys from your cat when you aren't supervising them. If ingested, these can cause hazardous blockages.

## **Hiding Spots and Escape Routes**

Cats can be sneaky. They are great hidiers and can fit into very small spaces. You don't want them hiding anywhere they could get hurt or finding ways to sneak out of the house. Do a sweep of your house to make sure windows are secure and there aren't accessible air vents, utility closets, attic crawl-spaces, or other dangerous spots that kitty might explore. If you have a really curious kitty, you may even need to invest in extra precautions like screw-in air vent covers or child-safety locks for cabinet doors.

# Cat Supplies

Before you bring your new kitty home, take a trip to the store and make sure you have everything they're going to need.

## Litter Boxes

Cats can have strong preferences about what type of litter box and cat litter they like to use. To prevent or troubleshoot any inappropriate elimination, it's a good idea to provide a variety of options, and pay attention to your cat's preferences. A good rule of thumb is to have at least one litter box per cat PLUS one. That means two boxes for one cat, or three boxes for two cats, etc.

Most cats prefer uncovered litter boxes, so you'll want to have at least one box with no cover. Experiment with the type of litter (clumping vs. non-clumping, clay vs. pine) and depth of litter to see which your kitty prefers.

Make sure the boxes are easily accessible, with nothing blocking or frightening your cat on the way. For example, if you've got a really noisy washing machine, don't put the litter box in the laundry room. This is another reason to have multiple options: if your cat would have to walk past the dog or go through a noisy room to get to one, they can go to another.

## **Food and Water**

Get food and water dishes for your cat, and decide where in the house to put them. Many people don't know that cats prefer to have their water and food in different spots. As with the litter box, make sure your cat's food and water aren't anywhere they'll be afraid to go. Talk to your vet about what type of cat food is best for your kitty, and ask the shelter where you adopt what kind of food they're used to eating. When changing a pet's diet, you may need to take it slow.

## **Scratching Posts and Vertical Spaces**

Cats need to scratch their nails, and the more you can encourage them to scratch and play on their scratching post, the less they will scratch your furniture.

You may also want to provide a cat tree or other cat furniture for kitty to climb on. Vertical spaces are important for cats socially, especially if there are other cats in the house. Having cat trees and items at a variety of heights for your kitty can provide comfort, exercise, and enrichment. Many cat trees also have scratching surfaces!

## Collar and Identification

While collars are a great way to show off your kitty's impeccable fashion sense, it is also important to have a tag with your cat's name and your contact information in case kitty gets lost. Have this ready for day one - pets in a new home may be more likely to run away out of confusion. If your new pet is not already microchipped, make a plan to get them microchipped soon.

## Carrier

You'll need a cat carrier to safely transport your cat home from the shelter, as well as to and from the vet. Never take your cat loose in the car. Treats can help you teach kitty to get in the carrier, which can be a lifesaver in an emergency.

## Other

A cozy bed can be a great source of comfort for your new cat. Especially at first, your new cat may want places to hide. A covered bed, tunnel, or even a paper grocery bag can give your cat a place to feel safe, and discourage them from hiding in inappropriate spots. To keep your cat active and engaged, provide a variety of toys for them to play with by themselves and with you. If you are adopting a longer-haired cat, you may also need to get a brush.

[Now that your home is ready for your new cat, move on to page 25, "Assemble the Team!"](#)



# Preparing for a Dog



# Dog-Proof Your Home

Before you bring your new dog home, take some time to make sure your home is a safe place for your canine friend using these tips.

Dogs of all ages can be curious and playful, so it is important to follow these guidelines for a dog of any age. However, puppy-proofing may need to be more rigorous because puppies chew and play more, and may be interested in destroying things that an older dog would likely ignore. Additionally, a puppy may also still be potty-training, so keep that in mind when preparing a space for them.

## Plants

Dogs may munch on plants in your house and backyard, and many plants can be toxic to them. If you have houseplants or a garden, it is crucial to find out which plants are toxic. [Review this comprehensive guide to toxic and non-toxic plants.](#) If you have plants that are dangerous to dogs, consider giving them to a friend, taking them to work, or keeping them in a place that your dog can't access them.

## Foods

Some foods that are safe for humans are toxic to dogs, but that won't stop your pup from trying to steal a bite. Chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, xylitol (a common sweetener in peanut butter, candy, gum, mints, and sugar-free foods), grapes, and raisins are some of the most common offenders. Make sure that you store your food in a place that your dog can't get to it, and do your research before giving any human food to your dog. Make sure that everyone in your household knows what foods are toxic to your dog. It may be helpful to leave a list stuck to the refrigerator to remind everyone to be careful, especially while you're getting used to having a new family member.

## Other Toxins

Keep your pills and other medications where your dog can't get to them. You'll want to store household cleaning products and antifreeze out of reach, as these are also poisonous. For a more comprehensive list of potential poisons, check out the [ASPCA Animal Poison Control](#) resources.

If you think your pet may have ingested a potentially poisonous substance, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control or your local emergency vet right away. Make sure you have these emergency numbers stored in your phone.

ASPCA Animal Poison Control: (888) 426-4435

## **Kitty Food and Litter**

As strange as it sounds, many dogs love cat food, and even what cat food turns into (yuck)! If you have a cat, keep your kitty's food and litter box where your dog can't reach it. You may want to keep your cat's food and litter behind a baby gate that your cat can pass through but not your dog. This is also a good way to give your cat a break from their new doggy sibling.

## **Fences and Baby Gates**

Dogs can be little escape artists, especially when they're chasing something. Make sure the doors in your home are secure. Containing your dog with a baby gate may help prevent them from rushing the door.

If you have a fenced yard, walk the fence-line before bringing your dog home, and recheck it often, to make sure there are no gaps where your dog can escape. Always supervise your dog in the yard, even if you have a fence and think your yard is secure.

If you don't have a fence but are considering your options, a physical fence is more secure than an electric one. An electric fence will still allow strange animals into your yard to hurt your dog. Additionally, if your dog is chasing something, he may rush right past the electric field but then be too scared to come back.

# Dog Supplies

Before you bring your new dog home, take a trip to the store and make sure you have everything they're going to need. We'll help you figure out what supplies to buy and what supplies to avoid.

## Food and Water

Get food and water dishes for your dog, and decide where in the house to put them. Talk to your vet about what type of food is best for your dog, and ask the shelter where you adopt what kind of food they're used to eating. When changing a pet's diet, you may need to take it slow. You'll also want to have a variety of treats on hand to reward your dog's good behaviors. Dental bones and other safe, edible chews are a good idea as well.

## Toys

Any dog, especially a puppy, will need a variety of toys to chew and play with. Playing is a great way to bond with your dog and give them exercise and enrichment. Dogs love to chew, and offering toys can help you redirect them from chewing other items like shoes and furniture. Your pup will have their own toy preferences, so try a variety of rubber toys, rope toys, balls, and stuffed toys. Food puzzles and Kongs are also very useful and can keep your dog entertained for long periods.

## **Collar and Identification**

Make sure to get a safe collar for your new dog. A standard or martingale style collar is safe (a shock, prong, or choke collar is not).

Get a tag with your dog's name and your contact information in case they get lost. Have this ready for day one - pets in a new home may be more likely to run away out of confusion. If your new pet is not already microchipped, make a plan to get them microchipped soon.

## **Leashes and Harnesses**

Pick out a fixed-length leash, not retractable. A fixed-length leash lets your dog, and other pedestrians, know where their boundary is.

You may also want a harness. Choose a front-clip harness instead of a top-clip harness. With a front-clip harness, they will feel the tug on the leash better and will naturally tend to pivot to look back at you when they feel it tighten, rather than trying to barrel ahead.

## **Crates**

You may want to get a dog crate. Though many dog owners feel guilty about crating their dog, crating a dog is not punishment.

In fact, dogs tend to seek out small, cozy spaces as protective shelters. A crate can make your dog feel secure, and it can keep them safe while you're not around. Building a positive association with being in the crate can also be a lifesaver in an emergency.

## **Leashes and Harnesses**

Pick out a fixed-length leash, not retractable. Retractable leashes impede leash-training progress and create confusion for other people and dogs you may pass on your walk.

You may also want a harness. Always choose a front-clip harness instead of a top-clip harness. With a front-clip harness, they will feel the tug on the leash better and will tend to pivot to look back at you when they feel it tighten, rather than trying to barrel ahead.

## **Other**

Depending on your dog's hair, you may need a brush for grooming. You'll want to invest in some dog-safe cleaning and smell-removing products in case of accidents. You may also want to buy a dog bed for your new buddy!

## Dog Supplies to Avoid

Despite their popularity and availability at pet stores, there are pet supplies that can be harmful to your dog's health, behavior, and emotional well-being. Here are a few dog supplies you should never buy:

- Rawhides or other non-digestible chew toys. These are choking and ingestion hazards.
- Retractable leashes. Your dog won't be able to learn to walk within their boundary if that boundary is always changing. It will be frustrating for you and your dog. Additionally, when a dog is on a retractable leash, others passing by have no way of knowing how far the dog can go, making it difficult to avoid interactions when necessary. Use fixed-length leashes.
- Prong collars, choke collars, or shock collars. These can cause health and behavioral issues and harm your relationship with your dog. They are inhumane, and they actually impede training progress. The best way to teach your dog is through positive reinforcement. [Learn more about the hazards of punishment collars.](#)

Now that your home is ready for your new dog, move on to page 25, "Assemble the Team!"



# Assemble The Team



Bringing your new family member home will be a fun and exciting time, but also a busy and potentially overwhelming one, so you'll want to have your team of support in place before Fluffy or Fido steps paw into your home. This means researching vets, pet sitters, trainers, and estate planning ahead of time. You'll have your hands full playing tug or petting your purr-machine once they arrive and if an issue arises, you'll be glad you prepared ahead.

## Select a Veterinarian

### Finding The Right Vet For You

Ask friends, family, and neighbors for their recommendations and honest feedback about the vets they've used. Ask them what they like about their vet and how long they've been going to them. You can also look at reviews online, but turning to trusted friends may be more reliable. You can also ask the organization or shelter you're adopting from if they have a partner vet or any recommendations. They'll likely be familiar with many veterinarians in the area. Your new pet may have already been seeing a particular local vet while in the shelter's care.

You may also want to consider pet health insurance options.

## Schedule Your First Appointment

Once you decide on a vet, it is a good idea to go ahead and schedule a first visit right away. There are a number of benefits to seeing a vet shortly after bringing home your new buddy:

- **Building a Relationship:** Both you and your pet need to be comfortable with your veterinarian. Bringing your pet in early gives everyone a chance to get acquainted on a day when your pet is feeling good, so they're not meeting someone new on a day they're feeling sick later.
- **Establishing a Baseline:** A key element of care is establishing your pet's baseline health. The vet needs to see what your pet is like on a normal day when they're feeling good so they can monitor for any changes going forward. Pets can't tell us how they're feeling, so knowing what "normal" looks like for your pet can go a long way in diagnosing them if they get sick.
- **Thorough Exam and Questions:** Get your pet's medical history from the shelter you're adopting from. Many organizations will provide vaccines and spay/neuter, but your pet may not have had a physical exam with bloodwork yet.

Find out what vaccines and preventatives your pet has gotten already, and ask your vet which ones they need. If your pet isn't spayed or neutered, schedule that right away. Get your pet microchipped at this first visit if they aren't already.

# Select a Trainer or Pet Behavior Professional

There is currently no legal licensing requirement in the U.S in order to call yourself a trainer. This means that you'll need to do extra research to make sure you choose a responsible and qualified trainer. Here are a few things to look for:

- **Certification and Education:** Though not legally mandated, there are certifications for trainers! Look for credentials like CPDT or KPA. It's also a good sign if your trainer continually pursues additional education.
- **Positive Methods Only:** Before you see a trainer, make sure they don't use aversive methods that rely on force, pain, fear, or punishment. Punishment hurts your dog and your relationship, and actually impedes training progress. Positive reinforcement is not only more humane, it is proven effective.
- **Industry Best Practices:** Unfortunately, there are trainers who use unscientific methods and outdated training trends. Red flags include punishment, fear techniques, and bad advice like 'make your dog think you're the alpha.' Even if they have 40 years of experience, you want your trainer to stay current.

This [New York Times article](#) has additional in-depth advice to help you choose a trainer.

Ultimately, you'll need a trainer you feel comfortable with. Look for a trainer who will encourage you and your pet and help you succeed in the classroom and beyond. In addition to solving behavior issues, training is a chance to spend quality time with your pet, so it should be positive and fun for you both.

Paws4ever offers a variety of training classes and private lessons using positive and proven-effective methods to help you and your dog succeed. [Learn more about training at Paws4ever.](#)

## **Schedule Your First Class or Visit**

As with your vet, it can be beneficial to reach out to a trainer and sign up for a class or lesson soon after adopting. Start things off on the right paw with your new pet!

If there are any immediate issues, like if your dog doesn't know how to walk on leash or if your cat eliminates outside the litter box, you'll want to know where to turn for help right away. Picking out a trainer or behavior professional ahead of time can save you from added stress.

Even if you have no immediate behavior issues, training is perfect way to start bonding with your pet, building your relationship, and setting yourselves up for harmonious living! Training will establish good habits from the start, keep your pet's mind active, and provide a fun activity to do with your dog or cat (yes, cats can be trained too)!

## Select a Pet Sitter

Consider whether you're going to need a regular pet sitter or dog walker. If you work long hours, you may need someone to walk your dog. If you travel often, you may need to establish a regular pet sitter. Just as with veterinarians and trainers, do some research, ask your friends and family, and make sure you find someone you trust to care for your new buddy.

Even if you don't travel often, picking out a pet sitter ahead of time can save you time and stress in the future, especially if you wind up needing a sitter in an emergency situation.

## Update Your Estate Plan

You'll want to put at least a little thought and time into ensuring that your pets are included in your estate plan. At the very least, decide who you want to take care of your pet if you became unable to for some reason, and make sure that person is willing and able. You may want to put any special pet care instructions in writing.

You can include your pet in your will or life insurance policy, or set up a protected trust with funds for their care. You may also want to explore [Legacy Care programs](#), like the one at [Paws4ever](#).

# Final Steps



# Do A Trial Run

Now that you've decided to get a pet, established what type of pet is right for your family, prepared your home for a new pet, and assembled your pet care dream team, it is time to get some hands-on experience!

Even though you've put a lot of thought into this decision, committing to a new family member is a big decision, and it can be hard to imagine all of the potential impacts of adding them to your home. Luckily, there are a couple of win-win ways to get first hand experience before you finalize your decision!

Pet sitting for a friend or fostering with a local animal rescue is a smart way to spend some time with an animal at home. It will help you get a sense of the realities of having a pet and help you hone in on what traits you'll be looking for in a pet. Most organizations will provide you with resources like food, supplies, training, and advice while you foster.

Fostering can help you get to know the rescues in your area. It is also a good way to get to know a pet you're interested in before making a commitment. If it is a perfect match, most rescues will let fosters adopt their animal. If it isn't a good fit, you've still helped the animal and learned more about pet ownership and what you're looking for in a pet.



# Finding A Shelter or Animal Rescue

Do some research about the shelters and animal rescues in your area. Check out their websites and give them a call to find out about their adoption process and their values as an organization.

Here are a few questions you may want to ask:

- What are the requirements and procedures for adopting?
- Do they offer adoption counseling resources? Will they work with you select the pet that matches your must-haves, wants, and deal-breakers list?
- What post-adoption resources do they offer? Can you turn to them for advice after you bring your pet home? Is their staff knowledgeable and able to guide you through integrating your new pet into the home?
- What medical care do their pets receive? It is standard among reputable rescues for each animal to be spayed or neutered, up-to-date on vaccinations and parasite preventatives, and microchipped.

# Finding Your New Best Friend

Now that you're ready to start looking, here are a few helpful tips:

- Take your time picking out a pet. Sometimes, it's love at first sight. Other times, it takes a patience and visits to a few different shelters to find the right pet.
- Remember to bring your wish list with you to the shelter and share it with the shelter staff.
- If you have a dog at home already, some rescues may allow, or require, you to schedule a follow-up visit where you bring your dog to meet the new dog to make sure it's a good fit.
- Try to focus on finding a match for your personality and lifestyle, rather than deciding on a new pet based on breed or appearance.
- Plan to bring your new pet home when you're able to spend a lot of time at home with them and give them a gentle introduction to your home. Right before a big trip, busy work week, or other unusual events like home renovations or houseguests may not be the best time to bring a new pet home.
- If you're adopting a dog, plan on getting to know them and building a relationship before trying to take them out to the pet store, café patio, or dog park.

# Congratulations On Your New Pet!

A pet can be a source of unconditional love, endless laughter, and true companionship. Welcome to the start of a wonderful adventure!



## Paws4ever Resources:

-  [Adoption Center](#)
-  [Dog Training Program](#)
-  [Dog Training Tips](#)
-  [Adopter Resources](#)
-  [Dog Park](#)
-  [Legacy Care](#)

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