

GIVING A PET AS A HOLIDAY GIFT? HERE'S HOW TO SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

It's the most wonderful time of the year—the season of giving! During the holidays, many people decide to give dogs or cats as gifts, which can be a boon to shelter pets.

“There are millions of animals in need in the United States alone, and choosing to adopt a pet is an incredible gift to not only that animal, but also to your household, for it will never again be short of love and tail wags.

Of course, welcoming a new pet into your home is a big commitment... one people aren't always ready to make. Sadly, animal shelters see an influx of pets after the holidays when people receive them as gifts but are unable or unwilling to care for them. Rather than surprising someone with a pet they might not keep, we recommend visiting a shelter or looking at adoption websites as a family to make the decision together about which pet to bring home.



Wrapping a note or animal supplies and then making the gift ‘Let's pick out a new pet together’ is another way to bring an animal in need into the family. You should always consider visiting your local shelter or animal adoption organizations following the holidays when they have many animals in need.

Once you've found a good match, take care to ease your new pet's transition to your home. Professional dog trainers say a good first step is letting a new dog or cat explore the home without any pressure.

They should be given the opportunity to seek out attention from the new owners rather than being smothered. A calm atmosphere will allow the animal to decompress and be attentive to the positive aspects of their new environment.

We advise the following for a smooth transition:

- Familiarize yourself and other family members with the pet's body language so you can appropriately interact with the pet
- Educate children about body language, as well as how to safely handle the pet to prevent bites

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- Give all animals in the home time and space to adjust safely and try to minimize disruption to resident pets
- Keep the new pet in a small room or crate separate from the other animals when unsupervised
- Use positive reinforcement techniques, such as rewarding desired behavior with treats or praise, to promote bonding
- Introduce the new pet to other animals in the home prior to the final adoption decision to make sure they'll potentially get along.

Proper planning before actually bringing the animal home is a key element. It's important to know what type of animal would best suit the particular family and lifestyle.

At SunShine Animal Hospital, we are always willing to talk to a prospective owner about a pet they are considering.

There are so many wonderful dogs that need a home. Try to pick one with a personality that matches yours. If you don't want to go on five-mile runs daily, then avoid a breed or dog listed as 'high energy.' If a dog has been identified as having separation anxiety and you work 10-hour days and have a busy social life, you may struggle to keep that dog happy in your home environment. If you are a first-time dog owner, it can be challenging to have a dog that hasn't been well socialized. Know yourself and your lifestyle.

Whether you get an animal from a rescue organization or breeder we recommend bringing your new pet to us as soon as possible for a head to tail exam.

As Sunshine Animal Hospital, we can answer all your questions that can come along with a new pet of any age and help you get off to the right start. We are here to help set expectations and guide treatment plans for the family.

At your pet's first exam, you can expect:

- A review of the pet's vaccination history and recommendations for appropriate vaccines based on local ordinances and lifestyle
- A discussion about diet options, socialization, and training
- A complete health exam, which includes an assessment of the eyes, ears, mouth, heart and lungs, and skin and hair coat, as well as abdominal and overall body palpation and testing for parasites or disease
- An assessment of any pre-existing medical or behavioral conditions

If your new pet is a puppy or kitten, make a habit of touching their ears, paws, and mouth on a fairly regular basis to get them used to being handled during future visits to the animal hospital. This is particularly helpful for trimming a pet's nails to prevent pain or infection (which can

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occur with long nails that grow into the pads), treating ear infections, and being able to remove things from the pet's mouth or brush their teeth.

And at home with your new pet, be patient. New puppies will keep you up in the middle of the night and pee on the floor right in front of you. New kittens may crawl up your curtains or dig in your plants. An older pet may be very shell-shocked if they are just coming out of a shelter situation. It takes a few weeks to get into the routine and really see the personality of your new friend.