

TEN RULES FOR BUYING A PET: A HANDOUT

1) Be sure a pet fits your present and future lifestyle before you buy one (or accept a free one). That cute little puppy is going to grow. That kitten may use your furniture as a scratching post if not provided with a suitable substitute.

Are you planning on moving in the near future and are uncertain whether you could take animals with you? This is no excuse to kill a pet or turn the responsibility over to someone else. Did you know that veterinarians are asked to euthanize more pets for behavioral reasons than for medical reasons? This reflects a failure on the part of owners, not of pets. Pets are demanding of your time, and deserve to be when you make the conscious decision to bring one into your home. Be honest with yourself - don't "give it a try" and see what happens. What happens over 1800 times every hour of every day in the United States alone is that these animals are killed.

2. Be sure you can be a responsible pet owner. Although everyone considers themselves responsible, the facts say otherwise. Do you believe that cats should always be able to roam outdoors? Wrong! Do you think it is a pity not to have at least one litter from your current pet before it is neutered? Wrong! Is it all right to let your dog out without a leash because it always listens to you? Wrong! Pets need our attention, our protection, and our concern. They are not disposable when they misbehave, get older, or outlive their entertainment value.

3. Be sure you can afford a pet before you get one. Pets have needs and it is short-sighted to think that the purchase price is the last expense other than food. Pets need routine health care, vaccinations, spay/neutering, dentistry, training, and licensing. Most would agree however that a pet gives much more than it could ever cost. Should economic constraints arise, there are many public service organizations that will see that you can have your pet neutered at low or no cost. Failure to take advantage of these programs is a reflection of irresponsibility, not poverty.

4. Never buy a pet on impulse. Most puppy/kitten mills thrive on this behavior. Do you want to rescue that poor puppy from that enclosure? Can't stand to see those kittens kept in that unclean cage? Your intentions may be

honorable, but you are directly contributing to more of these animals being produced and sold that way. If you want to break the chain of events that makes this happen, don't buy a pet from these outlets, and caution others against it too.

5.If you do not need a pet for show purposes, consider adopting an animal that needs a home. Breed rescue organizations do their best to place animals in good homes and they will be familiar with the breed and be able to tell if they have a suitable pet for you. If you don't want a purebred, visit the local shelters. Not all shelters are created equal.

Only deal with ones that have the best interest of the animals at heart. Responsible shelters will want to make sure that the animals are going to an appropriate home, that you understand about vaccinations and health care, and that you agree to have the animal neutered if it has not yet been done.

6.If you do want a show quality pet or think you may want to breed it someday, deal only with a reputable breeder. Reputable breeders will undoubtedly be affiliated with the appropriate breed clubs, have health care information available for several generations of their animals, and if applicable, have had these animals screened for genetic problems.

Call the breed clubs and ask for information and a list of breeders they might recommend in your area. Many good breeders spend more time scrutinizing you before they will trust you with one of their animals than you'll spend assessing them. A good rule is not to buy any purebred where you can't see at least one of the parents and have access to the medical history and performance record of both.

7. If you intend to buy a purebred animal, check with your veterinarian as to the potential heredity problems in that breed and if they can be determined before purchase. Breeders that are truly interested in the breed will be happy to discuss these concerns with you, and, if possible, will provide proof of being clear, or can give a guarantee. The same cannot be said of indiscriminate breeders and many pet shops. What is their policy if your new pet has a hereditary defect? An exchange-only policy is common for pet-sale outlets but they know that once an animal has been welcomed into a family, most people can't return it. These problems can also happen to reputable breeders occasionally and how they are handled is a

mark of just how responsible they are. Always enquire before you buy.
Caveat emptor - Let the buyer beware!

8. Be reasonable when it comes to purchase price. You can buy a pet with 'papers' for \$25-\$2500. Either could be disasters. Ask yourself what your money is paying for. Has there been excellent prenatal care for the mother and proper health care for the puppies/kittens or are you paying for freight and cage space for an animal shipped in from a distance location? Were the parents champions (documented), did they hold titles in obedience, and are they clear of heritable disorders? Are the animals kept in clean, hygienic quarters and have they been well-socialized? These are much more important questions than does it have papers, or how much does it cost? Support those breeders that care enough to do the job right and expect to pay more.

9. Immediately after acquiring a new pet, make an appointment with your veterinarian and bring along with you all information you have about its previous health care. It is also wise to bring a stool sample since parasites such as worms are not unusual but will require proper diagnosis and treatment. Puppies and kittens need a series of vaccinations when young and then regular boosters annually. And, make sure you have your new pet spayed or neutered as soon as your veterinarian recommends. Do not wait for the first heat or the first litter. Did you know that you can significantly diminish the risk of mammary tumors in bitches by spaying them before their first heat? Neutered males are also at reduced risk of experiencing prostate problems later in life.

10. If you're truly interested in pets and THEIR welfare, take time to understand the issues and why so many pets are destroyed each year. Give a home to a pet in need. Don't accept a pet that doesn't fit your lifestyle. Don't buy a pet as a whim. Don't support irresponsible pet sales. Don't become a backyard breeder or buy a pet from one. Make sure that your pets have been neutered. And, if you know somebody who doesn't know better, tell them, or give them a copy of this.

A dog is a huge investment in time and love;
please, make sure you educate yourself and invest wisely.