

POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

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Match Made In Heaven: Choosing The Right Pet

Thinking of getting a pet? Think carefully before you do. Owning a pet is an enormous responsibility, and involves a tremendous financial and time commitment. Each year, millions of Americans act impulsively in getting pets, and the pets often pay with their lives – more than 4 million dogs and cats are euthanized in U.S. animal shelters each year. Many are there because their owners decided they weren't ready for the expense and responsibility of pet ownership. In fact, it's estimated that 60-70% of pets won't remain with their original owners. So PLEASE, slow down and put the necessary time and care into considering whether you are truly ready to add a pet to your life, and if so, what type of pet. Indiana-PAW offers the three-step approach below to help guide you in your quest to find your lifetime friend.

STEP 1: Questions To Ask Yourself About You

Can I Afford A Pet?



- To responsibly care for a pet typically costs thousands of dollars a year! Make sure you're financially able to do this before getting a pet!
- Here are some of the regular, fixed costs you can expect:
 - Food;
 - Vet care (both regular exams and vaccinations);
 - Medications (pets, just like people, often suffer from allergies, thyroid problems, etc., that require regular medication);
 - Preventative medication that nearly all pets should be on for their safety, including heartworm and flea preventative;
 - Training classes;
 - Grooming;
 - Cat litter, litter boxes, pooper scoopers;
 - Toys;
 - Collar, leash, tags, licenses;
 - Petsitters or boarding, should you need to go out of town; and
 - Extra rent if you live in an apartment or townhouse.
- In addition, there are often large, one-time or unanticipated costs like:
 - Vet costs if your pet should become sick or injured;
 - Carpet cleaning and other costs associated with damage to property caused by pets; and
 - Fencing to keep your pet contained.

Do I Have Time For A Pet?

- Having a pet takes a LOT of time! Before getting a pet, ask yourself if you're willing to spend a significant portion of your free time doing things like:
 - Feeding him;

- Exercising her (walking your dog, playing with your cat);
- Taking him to the vet;
- Grooming her;
- Taking him to a trainer and working to socialize him; and
- Cleaning up after her (cleaning kitty litter boxes, doing poo-patrol in the backyard).

Will A Pet Fit Into My Lifestyle?

- Getting a pet will forever change how you live, how you spend your time and money, and what happens in and to your home. Ask yourself the following types of questions to figure out whether you're really ready for a pet:
 - Is this the right time in your life to get a pet? If you're planning to move, marry, divorce, or go away to college, it may not be.
 - Are you ready to have a pet for 10, 15 or even 20 years? If not, please don't get one!
 - Who will care for the pet while you're at work? When you take a vacation? If you get sick?
 - Do you have an active lifestyle for a young or energetic pet? If not, consider not getting a pet, or getting a sedentary, older pet.
 - Are you willing to housetrain a pet, and be patient with a pet who may occasionally damage your property?
 - Will a new pet get along with existing pets?
 - Is the rest of your family supportive of your decision to get a pet? If not, please reconsider! Every year, millions of animals wind up at shelters because their owner's family members didn't want a pet.

Do I Have Space For A Pet?

- All pets should live indoors and be a part of the family. It's critical that your home be safe for a pet. Before you get one, please consider the following:
 - If you rent, will your landlord allow you to have a pet of this type and size? Can you afford the extra rent deposit for a pet?
 - If you have to move, are you willing to spend the time looking for pet-friendly housing? Every year, millions of pets wind up at shelters because their owners were moving and didn't want to hassle with finding pet-friendly living arrangements.
 - Do you have adequate space in your home and yard for a pet?
 - Do you have a place outdoors to take your pet to go to the bathroom and exercise safely? If not, are you prepared to put up a fence?

STEP 2: Questions To Ask Yourself About The Pet You're Considering

Should I Get An Adult Or Infant Pet?

- In evaluating whether to get an adult or infant pet, consider the following:
 - **Advantages To Adult Pets:**
 - You're probably saving the pet's life – adults have a much harder time finding homes, as people incorrectly assume they're "damaged goods."
 - The pet may already be housetrained and have even had basic training!
 - You can see the pet's full-grown size, manners and temperament – no surprises!
 - The hassle of infancy and adolescence is over.

- **Disadvantages To Adult Pets:**
 - You may need to help the pet overcome behavioral issues they inherited from their prior home.
 - You may need to be patient while the pet adjusts to their new environment (but this usually occurs quickly).
- **Advantages To Infant Pets:**
 - You may find it easier to mold their behavior to suit your lifestyle.
- **Disadvantages To Infant Pets:**
 - Require far more time and attention.
 - More likely to destroy your home.
 - Often require someone at home during the day for housetraining.
 - Usually require more training and socialization, especially when they hit adolescence.

Should I Get A Mixed Breed Or Purebred Pet?

- In evaluating whether to get a mixed breed or purebred pet, consider the following:
 - **Advantages To Mixed Breed Pets:**
 - You're probably saving the pet's life – mixed breeds have a much harder time finding homes, as people incorrectly assume they're "less desirable" than purebred pets.
 - Are often healthier than purebred pets.
 - Often have fewer behavioral issues than purebred pets.
 - Are typically less expensive to obtain.
 - **Disadvantages To Mixed Breed Pets:**
 - It may be harder to predict their size and temperament (of course, this isn't an issue if you get an adult pet!).
 - **Advantages To Purebred Pets:**
 - It may be easier to predict their size and temperament.
 - **Disadvantages To Purebred Pets:**
 - Frequently have more health and behavioral problems than mixes, because they're often overbred or inbred.
 - Can be very expensive to buy.

What Are The Unique Needs Of This Particular Pet?

- Once you decide whether to get an adult or infant pet, and whether to get a purebred or mixed-breed pet, you'll want to consider the following questions:
 - What are the dietary, health care and grooming requirements for this pet?
 - What are the exercise and space needs of this pet?
 - How easy/difficult will it be to train this pet?
 - What was the original purpose of this breed (or breeds, if you're adopting a mixed-breed) of pet? If you're adopting a dog who was bred to herd sheep and you want a lap dog, this might not be a good fit! 😊

STEP 3: Where To Get A Pet

Where To Find Your Four-Legged Buddy

- You can find a pet in many places, including at local animal shelters, with a breed-specific rescue group, through a reputable breeder, or at a pet store.
- **Indiana-PAW strongly encourages citizens to make local animal shelters and breed-specific rescue groups their first option when looking for a pet.** This is for many reasons:
 - When you adopt from a shelter or rescue group, you're saving the life of an animal who may otherwise be euthanized.
 - Because most shelters and rescue groups screen for good health and temperament, you're more likely to find a healthy, well-behaved pet there than anywhere else.
 - Shelters and rescue groups typically have adoption counselors to match you with the right pet. They're not interested in making money – they're only interested in finding you the right pet!

There are more than 200 shelters and rescue groups across Indiana where you can adopt a wonderful pet! For phone numbers and addresses for them, visit www.indiana-paw.com and click on the link to the "Super Database."

- If you're intent on purchasing a pet from a breeder or pet store:
 - Indiana-PAW encourages you to investigate first, and make sure they are reputable. Many breeders are irresponsible, and many pet stores sell animals obtained from puppy and kitten mills.
 - Keep in mind, for every animal purchased from a breeder or pet store, an animal in a shelter will not find a home.

Suggested Reading

- The Humane Society for Seattle/King County, "Choosing A Pet" <http://www.seattlehumane.org/Choosingapet.pdf>
- The Humane Society of the United States, "Choosing the Right Dog" http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_adoption_information/choosing_the_right_dog.html
- The Humane Society of the United States, "Choosing the Right Cat" http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_adoption_information/choosing_the_right_cat.html

Important Note: Indiana-PAW's POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one's veterinarian and/or a trained behavior specialist.