

AROUND THE TOWNS

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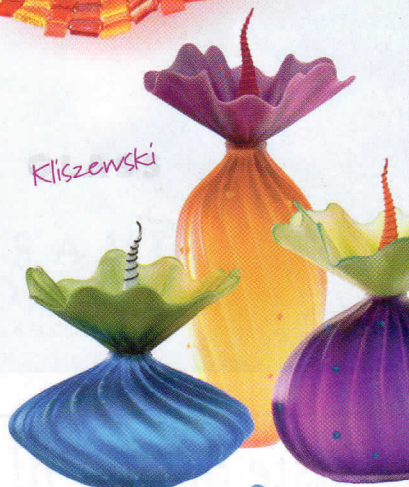
Do Pets Make Good Gifts?

EVERY HOLIDAY SEASON, the quest to find the “perfect gift” for a loved one is a challenge. Pets are frequent gifts in movies and popular culture, but is giving them a risky idea? See page 18 for what to consider when making the decision.





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Pets as Presents



They're cute, lovable and sure to bring a smile, but there are other important considerations when giving a pet as a gift

Photo courtesy of the Hinsdale Humane Society

When it comes to gift giving during the holidays, one tenet seems to be universal throughout different religions, cultures and families: everyone wants to give the “perfect gift” to those they love. For people who have an animal lover on their gift list, a new pet might seem to fit the bill.

However, a pet truly is a gift that keeps on giving, in some cases, for a very long time. Dogs and cats, for example, can live up to 15 years of age. So, if you are pondering giving an animal as a gift, it is important to go about the process responsibly, for the sake of all involved.

“In general, we would not recommend pets as presents, unless it is a parent adopting a pet for their minor child,” says Lori Halligan, executive director of the Hinsdale Humane Society. For those still determined to give a pet to a friend, neighbor or relative, Halligan says the gift should not be a surprise and suggests that gift-givers involve their loved one in the process.

“It’s really important to match the pet with the new (person or) family because many times people just have an immediate emotional bond with some pets and not with others,” says Halligan. Additionally, even the most fervent animal lovers are

not always ready or willing to take on the responsibility of a new pet. If this is the case, Halligan recommends giving “Sponsor an Animal” certificates as an alternative.

Hinsdale Humane Society’s “Sponsor an Animal” program enables people to help

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fund a shelter animal’s vaccinations and general care until they are adopted. “We make little holiday certificates with the animal’s photo,” says Halligan. “It’s a very popular gift item for a family.”

For parents who have been contemplating getting a pet for their children, the holidays can be a fun time to surprise them with a new furry friend. “Children usually have a couple weeks off at Christmas, and that is a nice time to bond with a family pet,” says Halligan.

While time-off from work and school during the holidays can be an ideal time to get to know a new pet, it can also be a

chaotic and stressful time. If you are planning on adding an animal member to the family, don't schedule any holiday trips.

Dr. John Green of Village Veterinary Practice in Western Springs explains that new puppies and kittens need proper vaccinations before they will be accepted at most boarding facilities. Vaccinating animals is often a multi-week process, so families bringing home a new pet during the holidays should plan on staying home with the animal and keeping up with visits to the veterinarian.

It's also important to make the animal's transition as smooth as possible. Green recommends bringing home some of the food that the animal has been eating, even if it's not the food you plan on feeding your pet long term. Gradually switching out the old food for the new avoids a shock to the animal's system at a time when they are acclimating to their new surroundings. It's also important to spend time bonding with a new animal because, as Green says, "We are going to take the place of litter mates or other animals they used to be around."

If parents are unsure about whether or not they and their family are ready for a new pet, Halligan suggests pet sitting, especially if the family has never before owned a pet. This allows a family to appreciate both how much fun and how much work is involved in caring for an animal. Shelters, like the Hinsdale Humane Society, also have resources that families can review in order to assess if they are ready for a new addition to the household. "If people want to call and ask about how to take care of a pet, we would be very happy to steer people in the right direction so they have information before they make the decision," says Halligan.

Ultimately, the most important aspect of getting or giving a pet during the holidays is behaving responsibly so as not to upset the recipient or the animal. "A lot of people think it's a cute idea," says Green. "But they don't necessarily think it all the way through."

Halligan emphasizes that the decision should be discussed thoroughly with all parties involved and not made on a whim. However, if a family does decide they are ready for a pet, what better way to create an unforgettable holiday memory than to present a loved one with a furry friend who will love them right back? — Brittany Clingen

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