

PETS

To Adopt or Not to Adopt an Important Question

By Lorraine Payette



Spring is on its way and with it a proliferation of new life and temptations. Posters and advertising are filled with cute fluffy bunnies and baby chicks and ducklings. Kittens and puppies peek out at us from the pages of books and magazines. The urge to just bring one home may be overpowering but are we truly ready to adopt?

"Adopting an animal is a lifetime commitment," says Les Wonch, president of the Gananoque and District Humane Society (GDHS). "You have to be willing to be there, to provide love, companionship, food, water, shelter and medical care throughout the animal's life. If you can't make that commitment and stick by it, you should let someone else take that animal home."

You need to learn about the animals before making a decision.

"The animal you choose depends on your lifestyle and needs," says Linda Johnston of the GDHS. "Cats and dogs suit most, and you really should avoid exotics (e.g., a chameleon is very high maintenance). They are most vulnerable, need very specific environments; you must know in detail what you are doing."

Exotic pets – ranging from parrots to reptiles to jaguarondis – are often impulse purchases, not well considered additions to the family. The more exotic the pet, the more care it requires, and many vets are not equipped or trained to provide proper medical care for them.

The age of the pet must be considered – while puppies and kittens are cute, they become dogs and cats. A mature animal can be as much fun as a baby, with far less headaches. Adult pets usually are already

house broken and may have certain skills such as leash training, knowing certain commands, etc.

The owner's home is also a necessary consideration. Smaller animals are better suited to smaller living spaces such as apartments, while larger animals do better in larger spaces. Big dogs tend to be very energetic and require lots of exercise, so a Bull Mastiff may not be a great choice for a bachelor apartment unless you are willing to get up and go out with it numerous times every day and night. It would be happier in a home with a larger acreage and space to play.

Age of the new owner is also very important. Animals require a constant commitment and cannot be simply brushed aside and forgotten. If giving an animal to a child, consider the age of the child and the level of responsibility he/she is able to maintain. A starter pet of something small that lives in a cage or a pocket pet would be good to start with. They require less care, and usually have shorter life spans (2-3 years in some cases), giving the child the time to learn to look after the animal properly, but not tying him/her down for 15 or more years. If giving to a senior citizen, again look at the level of responsibility and lifespan. If the animal outlives the owner, will you be willing to bring it into your home to fulfill the remaining time commitment? Remember the time and exercise required, the size of the animal and the abilities of the new owner.

Choosing between adoptions from a shelter/rescue facility, an accredited breeder or taking an animal from a neighbour is pretty much up to individual taste.

"Some organizations have done everything (spay or neuter, vaccinate, micro-chip) and prices, compared to if you had to do all this yourself, are quite reasonable," says Johnston. "You also need to consider buying the best food for that pet, housing needs, vet care, day-to-day and emergency costs."

If you do not adopt from a shelter, remember that good pet ownership involves things like spaying/neutering when young to prevent unwanted pregnancies, regular vaccinations and check-ups to make sure they remain in top physical health. Animals that have been surgically altered tend to be healthier and live longer than those who have not been done.

Being involved in the pet's life, giving it the same quality care you would give to your own child, is extremely important and this is why it is often referred to as "pet parenting".

Some of the things new pet parents may not consider are grooming and finding a reliable sitter to look after a pet when they have to go out of town. Everyone needs to get away sometimes, and it's good to know that there are care services out there to help look after things during that time. Some of these services may also be able to help find good dog walkers to help during long days at the office, or proper groomers to keep your pet at its most comfortable best. A good groomer will know right away if your animal needs a treatment for fleas, whether it has any sores or lumps, ingrown claws or other conditions you may not have noticed, and will help you get them taken care of right away. A proper sitter will not only feed and water your pet, but make sure that it gets attention, is properly cleaned up after and made to feel as comfortable as possible in your absence.

One way to get to know animals better is to volunteer some time at a shelter or rescue facility. Many cannot afford to pay staff, and are always looking for help not just with care, but with expenses as well.

"Of the money we receive, 98% goes to the animals (food, meds, vet care, spay & neuter) and shelter maintenance," says Johnston. "We're always ready for donations, whether they are selected clean, useable, interesting or decorative household items and antiques in order to be ready for our yard sale in May; gently used good quality adult sized clothing for our two clothing bazaars (including accessories and jewellery); food and toys for the animals; and especially help with all the chores."

So go out prepared and bring that new addition into someone's life. Do your research, learn the skills, take the responsibility and delight in knowing you gave a deserving pet a forever home. **LH**



**ONTARIO OSPCA
AND HUMANE SOCIETY**
Leeds & Grenville (Branch)
Centennial Road,
RR 4 Brockville, ON K6V 5T4
P: 613-345-5520 F: 613-345-2169
leedsgrenville@ospca.on.ca
www.leedsgrenville.ontariospca.ca

**Gananoque & District
Humane Society (Affiliate)**
85 Highway 32, RR1
Gananoque, ON K7G 2V3
P: 613-382-1512 F: 613-382-0333
humanesociety@bellnet.ca
www.ganhumanesociety.ca