



# A New Pet for the Holidays?

## Think Twice

**Holiday** cards are filled with images of irresistible pups and kittens poking their heads out of stockings, but the reality of adding a new pet to a household during the busy holiday season is quite different. The final weeks of the year are filled with decorating the house, making cookies and other delectable foods, buying gifts, entertaining, and visiting; a cheerful, busy time filled with anticipated and unanticipated events. It is wonderful and exciting for friends and family, but frightening to a pet trying to acclimate to a new environment.

The acquisition of a pet is for its lifetime, and a good beginning will set the tone for mutual companionship for the rest of its life---about 10 to 15 years. Whether you are thinking of giving a pet as a gift or adding one to your own household there are certain guidelines to follow.

Giving the surprise of a living, feeling, being to someone who is not prepared to, able to, or who wants to take on the long term commitment of pet ownership is inhumane and irresponsible. Do speak to the intended recipient of the gift of a live animal, and allow them to decide if pet ownership is right for them.

Now is the time to decide on specifics. Does the recipient want a dog or cat? Both come in all sizes and temperaments, breeds, mixed breeds, colors, and coat lengths. Do they want an active pet or one which is more likely to lie at their feet and cuddle? The time to make decisions is before they bring that pet home. Do allow the recipients to select their individual pet.

Then instead of bringing that new pet home to the frantic holiday environment, get a good book on pet care and training, wrap up some pet supplies, and leave them with an IOU under the tree. After the New Year, when everything has calmed down is the time to introduce the pet to a new environment and household routines. Puppies and kittens grow up to be adults. While we know the adult size of a cat, that pup might grow much larger, but needs human companionship always. It's not fair to bring love home, tie it on a rope, and banish it to solitary confinement in a backyard for the rest of its life.

It's not fair either, to bring that pet home, and after it reaches its maturity turn it in to the municipal facility for someone else to end its life because the owner has changed his mind.

The new owner will be responsible for providing a safe environment, food and clean water, veterinary care, dishes, leashes, tags, toys, and beds and having the adequate funds to do so. Responsible ownership means neutering and spaying at the appropriate time. A pet eats and eliminates waste products. Owners must clean up after their pet and safely dispose of these waste products.

Has the new owner thought about the arrangements they will need to make before they consider going on vacation?

Dogs need to be taught to walk on leash and be allowed to run free only inside a securely fenced yard. Pets should not be allowed to roam at will. A good neighbor is the responsible owner who creates the good pet citizen.

It is now the New Year. You have carefully considered the pet you want and have brought him home.

**Congratulations!**