

Preparing your home for a new pet

Adopting a new pet from a shelter can be a very rewarding experience. It's important that you and your family (2-legged and 4-legged!) are carefully prepared for a new member. The following are some household and training tips to help you settle your new pet into your home:

Establish the Rules

- Decide who is responsible for what: grooming, feeding, exercising, cleaning, play-time etc. Establish if there will be "off-limits" areas for your new pet.

Have all necessary supplies ready

- Food, bowls, leash or harness, collar and identification, brush, toys, scratching posts, cat trees, beds, bedding, rawhides, catnip

Pet-proof your home

- Lock away household chemicals such as cleaners, insecticides, antifreeze etc. Animals are especially attracted to antifreeze so clean up spills immediately. Even a small amount can be fatal to your pet.
- Place houseplants out of reach – some are poisonous to your pet
- Have separate areas for your new pet and existing pets. Pets need to be introduced to one another slowly – be sure you have an extra room or a kennel so that your pets can be separated until they have grown accustomed to each other
- Keep doors closed including the doors to your washer and dryer, closets and cupboards. Curious pets will explore wherever they have access!
- Keep potentially harmful household items out of reach including garbage, medicine, pins, elastics, thread, needles, etc.

Home Décor

- Window treatments: avoid pooling drapery, ornate tassels and long cords that can become strangulation hazards. Horizontal mini-blinds can become damaged by when a curious dog tries to see the outside world.
- Furniture: If you want to allow your pet to use a designated piece of furniture, cover this piece with a washable throw and teach your pet that this is the only piece of furniture he is allowed to use. Leather and vinyl furniture is easy to clean, but can be damaged by toe-nails that are too long. Be sure to clip your pet's nails regularly!
- Floors: Machine washable area rugs are easier to clean than wall-to-wall carpets. If you can't wash your carpet, use enzymatic cleaners specially made for pet urine. Tile and linoleum are pet-friendly floorings that allow you to easily wipe away accidents. Seal hardwood floors with polyurethane to prevent odour from lingering.

Pet Areas

- Use spill proof water bowls and large placemats under food and water bowls. Wash your pet's blanket and bedding frequently – use a lint roller on pillows. Scoop your cat's litter box at least once or twice per day.

Handling

- Everyone in the house should know how to safely pick up your pet. Also emphasize certain rules such as your pet should never be disturbed while eating or in his crate.

If you want to keep pets from jumping up on your bed and other furniture

- put a pet bed on the floor in every room to provide a welcoming alternative
- Give your pet a chance to learn house rules before you let him have unsupervised access to rooms with furniture.
- During times when you are relaxing, teach your dog that you'd like him to hang out on his bed. Place the bed beside your sofa or chair and encourage your dog to lie down in the bed. Give him something exciting to chew (rawhide or stuffed Kong toy) so his experience is positive. While he works on his treat, you can watch TV or read a book.
- If you have a cat, try putting double-sided sticky tape on furniture or other areas where she is interested in scratching. Near this area, provide your new cat with a scratching post that is tall enough for you're her to stretch out fully to scratch. Try putting some catnip on the scratching post for an extra attractant.

When you leave your new pet at home alone

- Use dog crates and gates to confine your new dog when home alone until he feels secure enough to have more unsupervised freedom. A smaller area will provide a less stressful environment for your dog to relax in. It's a good idea to get information from your veterinarian on how to properly implement a dog crate so that it becomes your dog's best friend when you are not around.
- Provide plenty of items for your dog to chew on, such as dog toys and raw hides.
- Give your dog an activity to keep him occupied just before you leave. If your dog is occupied with a food puzzle when you leave, he will be less anxious about being left. Do not say a prolonged, drawn out good-bye to your dog as this will add to his anxiety.
- It's most important to give your dog adequate aerobic exercise. The amount of exercise will depend on the dog, but at least 30 minutes of running, fetching, playing or swimming every day. A tired dog will be less likely to engage in destructive behaviour.
- Remember to increase your pet's roaming privileges gradually, room by room.
- Provide your cat with a variety of toys, scratching posts and cat trees to prevent boredom when you are not there.

Good preparation can ensure that the first few days with your new pet are stress free for you and for the pet. This is a great starting point for you, your family and your new pet to build strong bonds that will last for the lifetime of your pet.