

Pet Care



Ways to Help Animals

Maybe now isn't a good time for you to make a commitment to bringing an animal into your home.

Perhaps you work long hours or travel, or maybe your living situation isn't conducive to giving an animal a happy life. You can still find plenty of ways to support animals in your community.

VOLUNTEERING

You can give of your time to local shelters by providing care to animals, cleaning cages, feeding, watering, walking animals or helping them socialize. The Humane Society of the United States says many of their volunteers say that helping out changed their lives and taught them new skills.

"I don't know who received more love, the cats or the volunteers who worked side by side daily," said Roy Ware, an HSUS volunteer. "Although we all started as strangers arriving at the warehouse our first day, by lunch time, we all knew each others' stories and where we were from and what we did for a living. Many of us formed what I hope will be a lifetime bond, exchanging emails and phone numbers."

Depending on the organization, there may be certain requirements for volunteering. For instance, to be on an HSUS crisis team, you have to be at least 18 years old, under-



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go a criminal background check, complete educational courses and provide proof of certain immunizations.

DONATING MONEY

If you're short on time, consider adding local animal organizations to your annual

giving. USA.gov encourages you to do your research before donating to any charity, making sure the organization is on the up-and-up. You can check a charity's 501(c)3 status with the IRS. Also check in with your state's secretary of state or attorney

general to make sure the charity's state licenses are current.

You can donate money, of course, but also consider donating goods and personal property. Household items can go to a garage sale to raise funds, but many shelters also

use things like old blankets, towels and clothes for animal bedding. You can even donate vehicles. The animal organization may choose to use it in their operations or they can sell it and use the money.

Make sure to keep records of all your charitable donations.

Can My Pet Get COVID-19?

The short answer to this question is a firm maybe.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that a small number of pets worldwide have been reported to be infected with the novel coronavirus, mostly after contact with people that had COVID-19.

SPREADING THE VIRUS

The CDC says there's still a lot we don't know about COVID-19, but they do know that it can spread to people from animals and vice-versa. But the risk is low, the CDC says, and it can be even lower if pet owners and every eligible person in the household gets vaccinated. If your or someone in your house does get COVID-19, quarantine yourself from everyone in the house, including your pets. If possible, your pets shouldn't have contact with unvaccinated people outside your home.

It's important to remember that while pets can catch and spread COVID-19, you shouldn't force them to wear a mask, as it may harm your pet. The same with wiping them down with sanitizer or other disinfectants. Ask your veterinarian for safe advice on keeping your pets clean and safe.

IF THEY'RE SICK

The CDC says that pets may or may not get sick if they have COVID-19. Serious illness in pets appears to be



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extremely rare; usually, the CDC says, cases are mild and your pet can be taken care of at home. If you think your pet has COVID-19, call your veterinarian. Remember, most pets get the virus after coming in

close contact with someone that has the virus.

If your pet does have COVID-19, the veterinarian may recommend that your pet stay at home instead of the veterinary clinic. Alert your vet

if your pet is having trouble breathing or if you think it's an emergency. While your pet is recovering, the CDC recommends that you avoid taking trips outside the home with your pet, even if it appears to

be feeling better. This includes trips to the groomers, including mobile grooming, visits to pet daycare or boarding, and using dog walkers or pet sitters that don't live in your home.

How to Find a Groomer

Good hygiene is an important part of keeping your pet healthy. Grooming, the American Kennel Club says, is an important and skilled profession that does much more than just keeping your pet looking good.

Here are some questions the AKC recommends to ask any potential groomer:

1. May I see your facility?

Some important things to look for are a clean, well-ventilated space with sturdy tables and tubs. Look at the products they use and make sure they're products designed for pets and not humans.

2. What services do you provide?

Most groomers provide services like brushing, shampooing and trimming your pet's hair. But also ask if they provide like any other hygiene services, such as teeth brushing or cleaning.

3. May I watch while you groom my pet?

It's not unreasonable to want to watch, especially the first time your pet is groomed.

4. What kind of training do you have?

Grooming training can vary,



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the AKC says, from on-the-job training to apprenticeships and mentoring programs. Your groomer may have even went to a school for grooming. No matter what kind of training they have, asking about it gives you a good idea of their level of investment and expertise.

5. How will my pet be housed?

Ask how your pet will be contained when not on the

grooming table. Pets not being groomed must be secured in a crate or a designated play area with the owner's consent. The crates should be single occupancy with clean padding, plenty of air and in view of personnel.

6. Do you have a first aid kit?

Groomers should have a first aid kit in plain view. Staff members should be familiar with the kit and it should be

well stocked.

7. Do you carry liability insurance?

It can be an awkward question to ask, but you need to know if your groomer has insurance in case your pet is injured while in their care. Their policy should cover any medical expenses incurred.

8. What do you do in case of emergency?

While we hope they never

have to use that plan, you should ask about the groomer's emergency or disaster plans and get to know them yourself.

9. How much will my grooming cost?

Ask how much each service costs to avoid any sticker shock. The cost of a grooming can depend on the size of your pet and the length of their coat, which may also vary by season.

Spay/Neuter Your Pets

Spaying and neutering your pets can help lower the population of unwanted pets by preventing your pet from accidentally reproducing.

Here's what you need to know about spaying and neutering your pets from the American Veterinary Medical Association.

VOCABULARY

There are some terms you may hear your veterinarian use when discussing spaying and neutering your pet.

Ovariohysterectomy: This is the technical term for spaying. It means the ovaries, Fallopian tubes and uterus are removed from a female animal. It eliminates a heat cycle and breeding behaviors.

Orchiectomy: This is the technical term for neutering. The testes are removed from a male pet, making him unable to reproduce and reduces or eliminates breeding behaviors.

There are also alternatives to the typical spay or neuter.

Hysterectomy: Removing the uterus and part of the Fallopian tubes of a female pet. This makes them unable to reproduce, but her ovaries and her hormones will remain. This may not eliminate their breeding behavior.

Vasectomy: The vas deferents, or the tube that conducts



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sperm from the testes is cut or removed. This makes the pet unable to reproduce, but they retain the testes and hormones. Breeding behaviors may also remain.

Ovariectomy: Ovaries are removed from a female pet, but the uterus remains. She is still able to reproduce, but it eliminates her heat cycle and

breeding behaviors.

NONSURGICAL OPTIONS

There is a product, the AVMA says, that can be injected into your male pet to stop sperm production and render the animal infertile. However, it doesn't stop the hormones and, therefore, any breeding behaviors will continue.

WHY SPAY OR NEUTER?

Millions of unwanted animals are euthanized every year, the AVMA says, many the product of unintentional breeding. By having your pet sterilized, you can prevent unintended litters and also avoid some serious health problems. Spayed or neutered animals are protected from diseases such as uterine

infections and some types of cancer.

Spaying and neutering, the AVMA says, has no effect on a pet's intelligence of ability to learn, play, work or hunt. Some pets tend to be better behaved after spaying or neutering, and the operation may eliminate some unwanted behaviors associated with breeding.

Plenty of Fish

Aquariums can provide a cool, calming environment in your home or business.

They range from a simple fish bowl all the way up to hundreds-of-gallons saltwater tanks with live corals, fish and other sea creatures. The type of aquarium depends on what you want to do and how much work you want to put into it.

BIGGER IS BETTER

Larger aquariums are easier to care for say the experts at Tetra, an aquarium and fish products company. It says that it's easier to maintain balance in a 20-gallon aquarium or larger. You should feed your fish once or twice per day in small doses, keep your aquarium light on for about 10 hours per day and keep your water at around 78 degrees.

Every two weeks, change about a quarter of the water. Consider dosing your water with certain additives to remove harmful chemicals from your tap water and set your fish up with a prime environment. Once a month, change your aquarium's filter cartridge and clean the tank with water. Clean the glass inside and out and all your aquarium's decorations. You should also clean the gravel and siphon up any waste that's gathered on the bottom



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of the tank.

Put your aquarium in a place in your home that's away from direct sunlight, windows and vents. You also want to keep it out of high-traffic areas to avoid any accidents.

EQUIPMENT

It can be overwhelming standing in the aisle of the pet store looking at all the aquarium equipment.

There's some equipment

that's necessary for starting up your aquarium. Tetra recommends a good filter to provide clean, healthy water for your critters.

Air pumps add oxygen to the water and heater will keep the water warm enough to keep your fish healthy. Make sure to purchase the correct heater for your tank size and that your aquarium has a hood or canopy to keep heat in. Also grab a thermometer so you can easily check the

temperature in your tank. Aquarium lighting mimics the sun your fish would normally get in the wild. You should leave an aquarium light on for up to 12 hours a day, but ideally for 10 hours.

Gravel isn't just decorative, it's a great home for helpful bacteria that can break down the waste your fish create. You should also use a variety of small, medium and large plants to create a comfy home for your fish. Decorative caves

and tunnels give your fish places to hide and feel safe.

TYPES OF FISH

Freshwater fish are the easiest to start with. Tetra recommends starting with inexpensive test fish to make sure your aquarium is working properly. Also remember that different fish breeds have different personalities. Tropical fish shouldn't mix with goldfish, and some breeds are more aggressive than others.

Backyard Chickens

Shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic spurred more people than every to get into raising backyard chickens.

Having a few hens in your backyard can give you quality eggs for your fridge and also reduce the insect population around your home. Here's what you need to know about starting and keeping your own flock of chickens.

FOLLOW THE RULES

Before you count your chickens, look into whether or not it's legal to keep chickens where you live. Many communities, especially in urban or suburban areas, have restrictions on the quantity and location of your backyard flock. Common restrictions, the University of Florida says, limit birds, establish a setback from neighboring properties and prohibit roosters. Most areas prohibit roaming poultry, but there may be exceptions for school projects.

CHICKEN HOUSING

Pinterest is full of elaborate coops, but your chickens don't need a palace. Kits and pre-assembled coops are available at many feed stores. At the minimum, your birds need an area covered by a roof and enclosed on at least two sides to protect your chickens from rain and



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wind. You should have at least three square feet per bird. Use fencing to keep the birds in and protect them from predators, including those that approach from above. And remember, those local ordinances may also include rules for how your coops look. So check those before you build.

Your coops should also include nesting boxes at least

12 by 12 by 12 and half-filled with straw or wood shavings. You should have at least one nest box for every five birds in your flock and they should be at least two feet off the ground. Each box can also have a perch, giving your hens a place to rest.

CHOOSING FEED

Solid nutrition leads to healthy birds (and eggs).

Provide free access to a quality chicken food and clean water. Make sure to use the right feed for your birds' size and age range. Starter and grower feeds contain more protein and layer feeds contain more calcium for laying birds.

Table scraps and other supplements can throw your chickens off their feed and

make them sick. Be careful when adding anything to your birds' food and water. The University of Florida says to never feed your chickens raw, green potato peels; nightshade plants such as rhubarb, peppers, potatoes, eggplants or tomato leaves; raw, dried or undercooked beans; avocado skins and pits; candy, chocolate or sugar; alcohol and tobacco.

Pet Adoption Facts

According to the ASPCA, more than 6 million companion animals come into the U.S. shelters every year.

Here are some more facts about animal shelters.

POPULATION

The shelter population is pretty evenly divided between dogs and cats. Nearly a million shelter animals are euthanized each year, but this number has been declining annually since 2011. The decline, the ASPCA says, can be partially explained by an increase in the percentage of animals adopted and an increase in the number of stray animals successfully returned to their owners.

About 4 million shelter animals are adopted every year, and that number is also pretty evenly divided between dogs and cats. About 810,000 animals are returned to their owners every year, and the vast majority of those are dogs. Dogs, Petfinder says, are more likely to have microchips, tags or tattoos to help identify them.

While there's no way to know how many stray dogs and cats live in the U.S., one estimate says there are more than 70 million stray cats alone, Petfinder says. The average fertile cat can produce two litters per year of up to four to six kittens. A fertile dog has, on average, one litter of four to six



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puppies per year. Pet overpopulation is a huge reason why shelters are so full; that's why it's important to have your pets spayed or neutered.

COSTS

The Humane Society of the United States says that adopting a pet may cost you less than buying a dog or cat from

a breeder. The cost of a spay or neuter, first vaccinations and even microchipping can be included in the adoption price. Adoption fees are also typically less than the breeder's bill, and some adoptions are even subsidized by municipalities.

Petfinder says the average cost of basic food and supplies, including training, for pets is

\$500 annually.

OTHER BENEFITS

Many shelter pets come housetrained, saving you time and costs when it comes to teaching your pet manners. Many trainers and pet stores also give discounts for their services and gear when you rescue an animal.

By adopting an animal, you can help more than just that one pet, The Humane Society says. By taking that animal home, you're making room in the shelter for more stray pets looking for homes. Plus, the adoption goes directly towards helping the shelters take better care for the animals they take in.