



ANIMAL KINGDOM

By Judith Hurrell

More than one in two U.K. households now owns a pet – but how can we make sure our four-legged friends have happy, healthy lives? National Pet Month (which takes place in April this year) provides the following guidelines;

Think carefully before getting a pet and learn about its special requirements.

Jackie Defriez, manager of The National Animal Welfare Trust in Watford, advises would-be pet owners to think about the costs of kennels, food, vet bills and dog walkers before they taken on a pet. Quality of life is also important. 'Pets need attention, love and training in order to fit into society. All these responsibilities need to be considered.' Contact NAWT on 0208 950 0177

Ensure your pet is sociable and well trained

For pet expert Hanne Grice, when it comes to dogs this is all about communication. 'I'm often called when the dog is on its 'last chance' with the family. But this is nearly always down to our misunderstanding of dogs' behaviour. In many cases, bad behavior can be prevented with practical management and an understanding of canine communication.' For more information contact Hanne on 01442 878628

Protect against disease

Clarke and Marshall Vets recommend your pet has annual health checks. 'Many diseases are preventable with the right vaccination programme. For young animals, contact us as soon as possible; newborn animals have a natural immunity gained from their mother but this only lasts a few weeks. You should maintain a vaccination record to ensure your pet receives boosters when required.' For more information contact Clarke and Marshall on 01442 863776

Groom your pet regularly

Sue Graham of Handsome Hounds in Boxmoor recommends families research breeds before they get a dog. 'If you choose a high-maintenance breed, get all the family involved. A daily groom will save discomfort for your dog in the long run and prevent unnecessarily short cuts. Grooming also has health benefits. We're often the first to find lumps and skin conditions.' For more information contact Handsome Hounds on 01442 219236



Control your pet and ensure it is properly identified
Cayton Veterinary Surgery recommends micro-chipping your pet. 'Each microchip carries a unique code which can be recognised by a hand-held reader passed near the neck. This provides an effective way of identifying an individual animal so if an animal is lost, or there is a dispute over ownership, the owners can be found. Microchips are implanted during normal appointment times in a similar way to injections.' For more information contact Cayton Veterinary Surgery on 01727 852667

Other recommendations from National Pet Month include;

- Take out pet insurance for dogs, cats, rabbits and horses to cover against unexpected veterinary fees and third party liability
- Provide a nutritious and well balanced diet
- Provide suitable housing and bedding
- Clean up after your pet and worm it regularly
- Prevent unwanted litters and neuter your pet when appropriate

Those should keep tails wagging...

