



JUNE 8, 2011

Choosing a Pet Sitter

Pet sitters do much more than provide your pet with food and water while you're away



Pet sitters do much more than provide a pet with food and water while their guardian is away from home.

A good pet sitter also spends quality time with the animal, gives him exercise and knows how to tell if he needs veterinary attention. What's more, pet sitters typically offer additional services, such as taking in mail and newspapers and watering plants.

But just because someone calls herself a pet sitter doesn't mean she's qualified to do the job.

Why hire a pet sitter?

A pet sitter—a professional, qualified individual paid to care for your pet—offers both you and your pet many benefits.

Your pet gets:

- The environment he knows best.
- His regular diet and routine.

- Relief from traveling to and staying in an unfamiliar place with other animals (such as a boarding kennel).
- Attention while you're away.

You get:

Happier friends and neighbors, who aren't burdened with caring for your pet.

- The peace of mind that comes from knowing that your pet is being cared for by a professional.
- Someone to bring in your newspaper and mail so potential burglars don't know you're away.
- Someone who will come to your home so you don't have to drive your pet to a boarding kennel.
- Other services provided by most pet sitters, such as plant watering and pet grooming.

Where do I find a pet sitter?

Start with a recommendation from a friend, neighbor, veterinarian, humane society or dog trainer. Check online or in the Yellow Pages under "Pet Sitting Services." You can also contact the [National Association of Professional Pet Sitters](#) (856-439-0324) or [Pet Sitters International](#) (336-983-9222).

What should I look for?

It's important to learn all you can about a prospective pet sitters' qualifications and services. Before selecting a pet sitter, interview the candidates over the phone or at your home. Find out the following:

- Can the pet sitter provide written proof that she has commercial liability insurance (to cover accidents and negligence) and is bonded (to protect against theft by a pet sitter or her employees)?
- What training has the pet sitter completed?
- Will the pet sitter record notes about your pet—such as his likes, dislikes, fears, habits, medical conditions, medications, and routines?
- Is the pet sitter associated with a veterinarian who can provide emergency services?
- What will happen if the pet sitter experiences car trouble or becomes ill? Does she have a backup?
- Will the pet sitter provide related services such as in-home grooming, dog walking, dog training and play time?
- Will the pet sitter provide a written service contract spelling out services and fees?
- If the pet sitter provides live-in services, what are the specific times she agrees to be with your pet? Is this detailed in the contract?
- How does your pet sitter make sure that you have returned home?
- Will the pet sitter provide you with the phone numbers of other clients who have agreed to serve as references?

Even if you like what you hear from the pet sitter and from her references, it's important to have the prospective pet sitter come to your home to meet your pet before actually hiring her for a pet-sitting job. Watch how she interacts with your pet—does your pet seem comfortable with the person? If this visit goes well, start by hiring the pet sitter to care for your pet during a short trip, such as a weekend excursion. That way, you can work out any problems before leaving your beloved pet in the pet sitter's care for longer periods.

Helping the pet sitter and your pet

Of course, even the most trustworthy, experienced pet sitter will have trouble if you haven't also kept your end of the bargain. Here are your responsibilities:

- Make reservations with your pet sitter early, especially during holidays.
- Ensure your pet is well socialized and allows strangers to handle him.
- Affix current identification tags to your pet's collar.
- Maintain current vaccinations for your pet.

- Leave clear instructions detailing specific pet-care responsibilities and emergency contact information, including how to reach you and your veterinarian.
- Leave pet food and supplies in one place.
- Buy extra pet supplies in case you're away longer than planned.
- Leave a key with a trustworthy neighbor as a backup, and give him and your pet sitter each other's phone numbers. Be sure those extra keys work before giving them out.
- Show the pet sitter your home's important safety features such as the circuit breaker and security system. Finally, have a safe and fun trip. And remember to bring your pet sitter's phone number in case your plans change—or you just want to find out how Fluffy and Fido are doing.

© 2012 The Humane Society of the United States

The Humane Society of the United States is registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions to The Humane Society of the United States are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. The HSUS's tax identification number is 53-0225390.