

Finding the Perfect Pet Sitter

It seems as if it were only yesterday we were immersed in the deep, dark cold dreariness of winter. Who can believe now that it's almost Memorial Day weekend? Many of us are celebrating the warmth and beauty of spring and are anticipating taking some much-needed and well-deserved vacation time. Just the thought of "vacation" brings a smile to our face and relief to our hearts.

Since, for so many of us, our pets are beloved family members, we look forward to spending our holiday time with our pets. We may take road trips with them or travel with them by plane (although this requires a lot of planning and coordination with the intended airline as to their rules and regulations concerning our pets, especially during the hot days of summer.)

Although many of us would love to spend quality vacation time with our pets, we find it impractical or impossible to do so. And so...we seek ways to keep our pets safe, happy and healthy while we are away.

In my opinion, it is least stressful and most beneficial for us as pet guardians and for our animal companions to be cared for in their own familiar, comfortable surroundings by qualified, pet-loving, well-trained pet-sitters who know, love and care our pets and who will do everything in their power to ensure that our pets will be well taken care of during our absence. As literally creatures of habit, our animal companions fare best when adhering to their regular daily routines regarding diet, exercise and sleep. An experienced and reliable pet sitter can keep our pets happy and healthy while we're away. But just how do we go about finding this magical being to be entrusted with the care of our beloved pet?

Here are some tips in ensuring that you find the "perfect" pet sitter:

- 1). Before attempting to find him or her, make a list of all the criteria he or she need to meet in order to meet your needs and the needs of your pet. Does he/she simply need to exercise, feed, provide fresh water and play with your pet? Are there medications required by your pet? Are there plants that need to be watered, mail and newspapers to be taken in and other household functions that need to be addressed?
- 2). Ask your friends, neighbors and colleagues who have used pet sitters for their recommendations and referrals. Ask them what duties they have their pet sitter perform while they are away. Are these consistent with what you will require?
- 3). Consult your veterinarian and vet techs for recommendations- some of them may actually provide pet sitting services or they can recommend their clients who use reputable pet sitters.
- 4). Inquire at your local animal welfare or rescue organization as to whether they know of responsible, caring, professional people who provide pet visits or pet sitting.

5). Ask employees of local pet supply stores such as PetSmart or Petco for recommendations - often they offer dog obedience and socialization classes on-site, and the trainers may themselves be available to pet sit or know of people willing and qualified to do the job.

6. Contact the NAPPS (National Association of Professional Pet Sitters) for referrals as well as their criteria which determine the qualifications of a potential pet sitter. The NAPPS offers a certification program for qualified prospective pet sitters.

7). Speak and meet with a prospective pet sitter and familiarize him with the pet(s) he will be caring for as well as your home.

8). Give him ample, detailed information about his anticipated responsibilities in writing so that he can refer to them whenever necessary. Also provide him with contact information, phone numbers and addresses of your vet, friends, and neighbors who can help out if necessary.

9). Make certain he has excellent references and experience and is licensed and bonded.

10). Make certain he is able to handle a veterinary emergency or any other kind of potential emergency and is aware of the phone number and location of the nearest veterinary emergency hospital as well as your vet's office.

When I am away from home and my canine kids, I feel a great sense of relief knowing that they are in the hands of a competent, compassionate and knowledgeable house sitter. I am much calmer and happier knowing that I have left my babies in the comfort and familiarity of their own home in the care of someone I trust.