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BC SPCA - Which Pet To Get

Helpful Information about Common Pets

Getting the right pet for you and your lifestyle isn't an easy decision. Below is some information that might help. Remember that [wild animals should not be kept as pets](#). Domesticated animals make the best pets.



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Cats

Cats are wonderful companion animals. They are good for people who don't want the responsibility of exercising their pet but still want companionship. They are less work than a dog but need your attention, care and time. There are many books available to help you have a better understanding your cat.

- **Life span:** Average 14-17 years; reported oldest 30 years.
- **Size:** Varies depending on breed; 1.8 –5.4kg (4 to 12 lbs).
- **Origin:** Believed to have originated from Egypt.
- **Status:** Domesticated thousands of years ago from wildcats of Africa.
- **Diet:** Cats are carnivorous. Commercial cat food has all the nutrients cats need.

Time: Cats though fairly independent do require your time. The minimum time required for a cat is 30-60 minutes a day.

Grooming: Though cats are impeccable self-groomers they do require some assistance. Longhaired cats should be brushed regularly and all cats need their claws trimmed. You may want a professional to do this but with care and patience most guardians should be able to do this themselves.

Play: A stimulating indoor environment for your cat allows him/her to express natural behaviours. Interactive toys that move and jump like imaginary prey stimulate their natural curiosity and instinct to stalk and pounce. A game of chase or peek-a-boo around doors and corners is a good way for you to play with your cat.

Outdoor options: Ideally cats should be kept indoors. They lead longer, healthier lives. Supervised outdoor activities can enrich your cat's experience. Training your cat to be on a harness and leash or providing an outdoor enclosure are ways to provide outdoor access.

Pros: While more independent than dogs, cats enjoy being around people. They are clean, quiet and require little space. Cats can be easily litter box trained and remain indoors all the time.

Cons: You must clean out the litter box daily. Cats also require regular grooming and their nails trimmed. Cats will scratch furniture unless you provide a scratch post and train them to use it. Cats require regular veterinary check-ups, vaccinations and spaying and neutering which can be expensive. Outdoor cats are more likely to require veterinary care.

Info: Cats require identification in case they get lost. There are special cat collars you can buy. Remember to have your cat spayed or neutered.

- For more information on the care of cats [click here](#).

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Dogs

Dogs are a very social animal and make great pets. You will need time and patience to learn their language and understand their needs. It is very important to train your dog so that you will have a good relationship. There are many good books and classes available. Make sure to choose a training method that uses only positive reinforcement. This is the most effective form of dog training.

- **Life span:** Average 10-15 years.
- **Size:** Varies depending on the breed.
- **Origin:** Different breeds of dogs come from virtually all places in the world.
- **Status:** Domesticated thousands of years ago. Origin believed to be wolf-like ancestors.
- **Diet:** Dogs are omnivores eating meat, grains and vegetables. Commercial dog food has all the nutrients dogs need.

Time: Dogs require more time than most pets. Outdoor exercise is important. Staying in a backyard is not exercise. They need to run or walk for 30 minutes at least 2 times a day plus quality time with you or the family.

Grooming: Depending on the breed of dog you will also be required to groom him/her. You may choose to take them to a professional groomer but it is a good idea to get your dog used to being brushed. Tangled, matted hair is very uncomfortable and can lead to skin problems.

Dental care is also important. Brushing your dog's teeth weekly will keep their teeth and gums healthy. This could prevent costly vet bills.

Play and pet: Play is an essential part of providing for your dog's well-being. Invest time to interact with your pet everyday. Your pet will thrive and you will strengthen the bond you share.

Pros: Dogs are social animals who like to belong to a family which they regard as their pack. Properly socialized dogs will be loyal companions. They are fun to play with and quite easy to care for.

Cons: Need lots of space and time. Cannot leave alone for long periods. You must always clean up after your dog. Dogs require regular grooming. Vet bills can be expensive. Dogs need to be trained which takes time and patience. Puppies need to be toilet trained.

Info: Make sure you have a well made collar and leash for going on your twice daily walks. All dogs must have a dog license and identification. Remember to have your dog spayed or neutered.

- For more information on the care of dogs [click here](#).

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Rabbits

Rabbits can be great pets, but they requires gentle handling and should not be handled without adult supervision by anyone under the age of 12. They must be picked up properly as they can kick quickly and seriously injure themselves (back injuries are common). They develop bonds with their guardian and can be very affectionate. Knowledge about handling, behaviour and care is essential

- **Life span:** Average 7-12 years (depending on breed).
- **Size:** Dwarf species from approximately 1.5kg to 5.5kg.
- **Origin:** Tame rabbits were bred from the wild European cotton-tail.
- **Status:** Domesticated. Bred as pets, food animals and laboratory animals. Many breeds and sizes available.
- **Diet:** Commercial pellets, hay (do not feed alfalfa); supplement with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Time: Rabbits require social time out of their cage in a secured area on a daily basis. Cages/hutches need to be cleaned once a week and litter should be changed every second day.

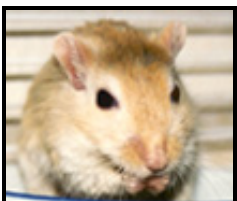
Pros: Sociable. Seldom bite. Unique personalities. Diurnal (awake during the day). Quiet, rarely make a sound. Can be easily litter box trained.

Cons: Some are skittish and territorial. Require calm environment and a habitat that allows for ample daily exercise. Rabbits will chew plants, electrical and phone cords so you must "rabbit-proof" your home. Easily injured if dropped. **Therefore not a good choice for small children.**

Info: Adapt best when raised in a social environment. Require a large habitat or exercise area with items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Males are called bucks and females are called does. The young are called kittens. Consider spaying or neutering your rabbit. It does help with some behaviour issues and if they escape they will not contribute to the overpopulation problem.

- For more information on the care of rabbits [click here](#).

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Gerbils

Life span: Average 4-6 years.

Size: Mouse-sized, 10cm body with 8cm tail.

 **Origin:** North African and central Asian deserts. Also known as Mongolian desert mice.

Status: Captive bred since 1960's.

Diet: Omnivore. Commercial gerbil mix containing seeds, nuts and pellets, fresh fruits, vegetables, and hay.

Time: Gerbils need their cage cleaned once a week. They are fun to watch and with care can be handled.

Pros: Sociable. Seldom bite. Very active, curious and adventurous both day and night. Very clean.

Cons: Require a habitat that allows for ample daily exercise. Small, fast moving animals can be difficult for young children to handle. Can nibble on fingers and be easily hurt if squeezed. Easy to lose if they escape from habitat.

Info: Best kept in pairs of same sex from birth. Adapt best when raised in a social environment. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Habitat requires plenty of room and nest building material as well as a medium for burrowing. Require warm, dry environment with a temperature range of 18-23°C.

- For more information on the care of gerbils [click here.](#)

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Hamsters

Life span: Average 2-3 years.

Size: Larger than a mouse and smaller than a guinea pig.

Origin: N. China, Siberia, Iran and Mongolia.

Status: Captive bred since 1930's. Several breeds are now available.

Diet: Omnivore. Commercial hamster mix containing seeds, nuts and pellets; also fresh fruits, vegetables, and hay.

Time: Hamsters are fairly easy to care for but need to be checked regularly to make sure they stay healthy. Since they are nocturnal the best time to play with a hamster is in the evening. Do not disturb them while they are sleeping. Their cages should be cleaned weekly. Food and water must be available to them at all times.

Pros: Exceptionally clean. Can be tamed to accept handling.

Cons: As nocturnal animals hamsters should not be disturbed or handled during the daytime. Shy, solitary creatures. Require calm and quiet daytime environment. Require a habitat that allows for ample nightly exercise. Prone to nip. Can be easily hurt if squeezed.

Info: Enjoy solitary living, though 2 females could be kept in the same habitat if born and raised together. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth.

- For more information on the care of hamsters [click here.](#)

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Rodents - Domestic Rats and Mice



Life span: Average 2-3 years.

Size: Mouse: 10cm body with 8cm tail; rat: 20cm body with 25cm tail.

Origin: Asia; several strains of domestic rats and mice now exist.

Status: Tame; through thousands of generations of selective breeding.

Diet: Omnivore. Commercial gerbil or hamster mix containing seeds, nuts and pellets. Supplement with hay, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Time: Rats and mice are quite easy to care for and can be fairly social animals if handled regularly. Their cages should be cleaned twice a week.

Pros: Easily tamed, if handled regularly. Seldom bite. Intelligent, curious and adventuresome both day and night. Very clean.

Cons: Require a habitat that allows for a lot of daily exercise. Small, fast moving animals can be difficult to handle. Tend to nibble on fingers. Can be easily hurt if squeezed or dropped. Easy to lose if they escape from habitat.

Info: Best kept in pairs of same sex from birth. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Habitat requires plenty of room and nest building material. Require warm, dry environment with a temperature range of 18-20°C.

- For more information on the care of rodents [click here](#).

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Guinea Pigs

Life span: Average 5-7 years.

Size: Grow to approximately 750g–1 kg. About 20-30 cm in length.

Origin: Peru.

Status: Domesticated over 5,000 years ago.

Diet: Herbivore. Fresh fruits, vegetables, hay, and special commercial pellets containing vitamin C.

Pros: Sociable. Seldom bite. Unique personalities. Diurnal (awake during the day). Quiet, but have a range of calls and chatters.

Cons: Some are skittish. Require calm environment and a large habitat that allows for plenty of daily exercise. The habitat requires regular cleaning. Long haired guinea pigs need to be groomed.

Info: Best kept in pairs of same sex. Males are called boars and females are sows. Enjoy being handled. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Do not climb and are content in a large habitat (6 square feet minimum).

- For more information on the care of guinea pigs [click here](#).

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Other Pets

What about Birds?

Birds can be fun. Many birds are tame and bred locally as pets while others are wild caught and shipped to Canada. Some exotic wild birds such as parrots may become endangered if they continue to be taken from the wild.



[Parrots](#) are cool but they do not make very good pets. They live anywhere from 40 to 100 years, and require a special diet and a lot of attention. Most budgies, parakeets and cockatiels have been captively bred as pets and are smaller and easier to care for. Remember, birds need a varied diet. You cannot feed birds just seeds.

- See our [bird care](#) fact sheet for more info.

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Do Reptiles Rule?

The BC SPCA is opposed to the importation or sale of [exotic animals as domestic pets](#). Animals such as iguanas, snakes, salamanders and turtles are fascinating creatures but require special care that is very difficult to provide even for experts. Often people who purchase these animals as pets become disappointed with them after a short while. They find that the animals either take too much time to care for, grow too big, cost too much to keep, or are too boring to make good pets. Also, many of these animals come directly from the wild and do not do well as pets, often suffering silently and then dying an early death. These animals deserve to be left in the wild.



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Fish are Fun?

Fish are amazing! With the right equipment which includes a large tank and accessories, keeping fish can be a lot of fun. However, remember that many exotic fish come from countries where fish catchers destroy the natural reef areas to harvest exotic fish for the pet stores. Ask your aquarium store for locally raised fish for your tank.



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<http://www.sPCA.bc.ca/AnimalCare/whichpet.asp>