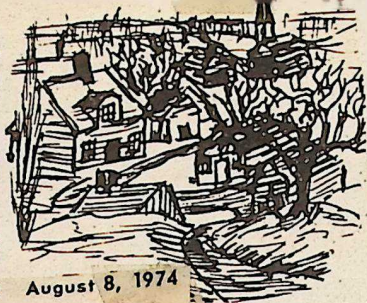


Village

View

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There are certain things you should know about pets before you bring one home and introduce it to the family. They start out little and grow larger, according to the breed; they start out cute and adorable, and grow-- as do people -- to mature individuals.

Pets are trainable and usually reflect the personalities of those they live with, and finally, they are a responsibility as well as a pleasure.

Your first responsibility as a pet-owner is to train it. A cat or dog will do almost anything expected of it, once it understands what's wanted. Realistic expectations are important, of course, and the animal will learn with gentle, courteous and consistent lessons.

Like all other living creatures, they need food at regularly scheduled hours. Use this for training and you've got it made.

You want your pet to come when you call it. Use the magic of feeding. Once the meal schedule is determined, precede it with a whistle or calling the animal's name, clap your hands, tap your foot, or rattle a spoon.

If you always do this when you feed it, your pet will come when you want, for that sound or action means food is about to appear. Reinforce the pattern with daily praise and caresses as well as food.

If you enjoy vocal communication with your pet, talk to it. When it responds, praise it. Both dogs and cats develop varied vocabularies, if encouraged. If you prefer a silent animal, don't talk to yours.

If you feel silly, talking to a cat or dog, use hand signals or body movements to communicate. The animal won't care as long as you're consistent.

If you disapprove of something it does, use a short simple word to scold it; chose an equally-understandable different sound for approval. "No" or "bad" means you want it to stop something; "good" or "okay" means you are pleased.

The words are unimportant; what matters is that you make the same sound each time. If kitty sharpens her claws on the rugs and furniture, say "no" every time. When she uses a pine tree or a scratching post, tell her she is good. You'll find she seeks your approval and will watch for opportunities to get it.

If you prefer hand signals, give positive reactions by nodding your head or offering your fingers for your pet to sniff. Negative signs might be a palm/down motion, a shake of your finger, the stamp of your foot. The slightest difference in your behavior will control the animal's.

If you and your pet are to understand one another, you must always follow the same routine. If you deviate from your pet's expectations it won't know what you want.

Decide where it shall sleep and eat, the grooming place, the place you will give it me-

dication or physical care. Keep each place separate and distinct.

When it needs attention because of some illness or injury, and you place it where you usually examine it for earmites or tend to a sore place, it will accept necessary medication or attention without objection, even if what you must do is painful.

The animal, after all, trusts you, depends on you, needs you. Food, comfort, affection, companionship, and help when sick or hurt -- all come from you. You are its world.

All your pet asks is to know what to expect from you. Then it will do its part.

If your pet doesn't meet your realistic expectations, you've somehow confused the animal. You've mixed up the signals or failed to establish them in the first place.

A happy pet is the one who knows what's expected of it; a happy owner is the person who lets his cat or dog know what's required of it and what the limits are.

You can have a pet without either of you being certain of what the other is going to do next. And both of you will be miserable. Or you can show your pet what you want, and both of you will be happy. If yours is hard to handle, it's your fault, not his.

Other responsibilities include regular exercise, a chance to keep clean, an available water supply at all times, protection from temperature extremes and bad weather, and medical attention whenever needed.

Protective inoculations for distemper and a visit to the vet in case of sickness, injury, any sign of pain or distress are part of being an owner.

Finally, you've a responsibility to see your animal doesn't become a homeless stray. If you acquire a pet while vacationing, make certain he either goes home with you when you leave, or is placed in an animal shelter if you no longer want him.

Please, don't desert him in the fond hope he can fend for himself. He cannot. He will suffer thirst, starvation, and mistreatment if you leave him.

Household pets are incapable of making it on their own. They cannot revert to a "wild state" and find food and shelter without some caring human providing for them.

An animal can be a pleasure for your whole family. Like children, though, they require time, patience, and love to grow properly and reach their potential.

As long as they live, they depend upon you to meet all their needs for care and affectionate attention.

If you know this before you acquire a pet, you'll never feel burdened by yours. Instead you'll reap the rewards that only a well-cared-for and well-trained animal can give -- a return in full measure of the love and loyalty you've invested.