

What makes a suitable home for a pet?

Homes should be checked before a sanctuary allows someone to take a pet – the pet is likely to be there for a lifetime! This includes looking around the home, checking that facilities and equipment have been prepared and discussing the care of the animal with the new owners.

A home should be checked out however small the pet animal. It may be 'only a mouse' to some people, but the mouse might take a different view!

Important questions to consider include:

1. Will the pet be happy in the home?
2. Will the pet have companionship of its own kind (where appropriate)?
3. Will the pet get enough human attention?
4. Do the people know the costs of keeping this kind of pet and can they afford it?
5. How much do the people know about the care of this kind of pet? Have they any past experience? Have they read a lot about it?
6. Will they be able to look after the pet for the rest of its life? For example, do they have a job which might take them abroad or are they likely to move to accommodation where they couldn't keep pets?
7. How do the people intend to prevent the animal from breeding? (A lot of pets have to be put down, or given to unsuitable homes, because too many are born.)
8. Pets of any kind should never be given as presents to people without checking first that they are wanted and that the new owner will look after them properly.

Scenarios for visitors 1

1. I want a companion when I come home from work now that I live alone. I've always loved animals and I'd like to help a homeless dog.
2. We have kept dogs since we were children and our last ones have just died. We would like a bitch so that we can breed from her. When doing the home-check, you find a large house and garden. The fence has fallen down in one place but is otherwise secure.
3. I am at home all day; my husband is a serviceman and we have just returned from a posting abroad. We had a dog but had to have it put down before returning to England – we thought it cruel to put an eight-year old dog through quarantine. We would like to adopt an unwanted springer spaniel.
4. Do you have any terrapins or tortoises? We have always been fond of reptiles. We thought we'd try you before going to a pet shop. You find you don't have either.
5. We would like to adopt a pony for our daughter. We have a large garden with a three-quarter acre orchard in it with lots of lovely grass going to waste. We haven't kept horses before but are willing to learn.
6. We had two ponies but one contracted cancer and had to be put down. We would like to adopt a donkey to keep the other one company. We have a four-acre field with shelter and stabling.

Scenarios for visitors 2

7. We love cats and had four but three of them have been run over recently – they have just built a new by-pass near our house. We would like to adopt a homeless animal.

8. We would like to adopt a mother cat and one of its kittens. We would like a tabby if possible and we want to breed from her. We live out in the country and our last cat just died of old age.

9. We really wanted a dog, but since we both go out to work and go on holiday abroad three months a year we thought it would be fairer to adopt a more independent animal. We would like a cat, preferably a good mouser. We live near a farm so there will be plenty for the cat to do when we are away.

10. We should like to adopt a pair of rabbits. We want to breed from them – we know a pet shop which says it may be able to sell the young for us. We don't have a garden, but we do have space for a hutch.

11. Can we adopt that rabbit? We have a guinea pig, which is lonely and we want a companion for it. Our garden is fenced and we have a hutch with an outside run.

Pet requirements 1

Requirements for dogs

Dogs are pack animals, who naturally would have companionship all day (and night) long. If allowed out unsupervised or if they escape, they may foul pavements and attack other animals. They need frequent exercise, and access to a garden outside.

Further questions to ask of potential owners include:

- Will there be someone at home nearly all day?
- Is there a garden with a suitable fence around it?
- Will they be strong enough to manage the animal?
- If there are small children, will they be at any risk?
- How much exercise will they be able to give the dog?
- Will they groom the dog adequately?
- Will the dog be vaccinated and/or neutered?
- How tidy is the home? What effect will a dog have on it? How much damage could it do? Are the potential owners prepared for this?

Requirements for horses and ponies

Horses and ponies are very expensive to buy and even more expensive to keep. They need access to at least two acres of good grass each; they suffer if they do not have companionship of their own kind; they need supplementary feeding in winter; they also need it in summer if ridden a lot. They need stables and a shelter in the field – from rain and wind in winter and, even more important, from the sun in summer. Unless you have thousands of pounds to spend, you shouldn't consider keeping horses or ponies. Many suffer severely because their owners cannot afford to look after them properly.

Pet requirements 2

Requirements for cats

Cats are more independent than dogs, but often still require a lot of companionship. Female cats do not usually stray far, but toms do. Cats rarely look before crossing roads and usually die young if a main road is within their territory. It is almost impossible to prevent an unneutered female cat from becoming pregnant since they come on heat every two weeks.

Further questions to ask of potential owners include:

- Is the home near a main road?
- Can the cat get in and out easily?
- How often will they be in?
- Do they intend to have the cat vaccinated and/or neutered?

Requirements for imported animals

These include tortoises, terrapins, snakes, some kinds of frog and some tropical fish. They can be difficult to look after, some requiring expert handling.

Animal welfare organisations are strongly opposed to the importing of animals as pets. They are often captured from the wild and as many as 90% die before they reach this country. Some are becoming rare in the wild because of the pet trade and this is adversely affecting local ecological systems. This is why it is now illegal to import tortoises.

Pet requirements 3

Requirements for rabbits and guinea pigs

One major problem is their tendency to breed at a very rapid rate and the chances are that their owners will not always be able to find a good home for the young.

Where possible they need the company of their own kind, except that males cannot usually be kept together as they may kill each other.

The ideal may be to keep a neutered male with a female or to keep one rabbit and one guinea pig, preferably of different sexes, together.

Anyone who doesn't want to pay the cost of neutering because 'it is only a rabbit' is unlikely to be a suitable owner.

Both need access to grass outside for part of the day, but their run will need to be secure from both cats and dogs which often kill them.

Further questions to ask of potential owners include:

- Is the garden fenced?
- Is there space for a run?
- Do they have a hutch and run ready?
- How many do they intend to keep?
- Will the hutch be in a sheltered position? Guinea pigs at least will need to be taken indoors in very cold weather, and both should have a cover over the wire mesh at night. Apart from anything else, this reduces the risk of them being frightened by cats.

Interview recording sheet

Name of animal sanctuary

Visitors' names

Type of animal to be rehomed

Questions	Answers	Were the answers given satisfactory?
1		<div><input type="checkbox"/> yes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> no</div>
2		<div><input type="checkbox"/> yes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> no</div>
3		<div><input type="checkbox"/> yes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> no</div>
4		<div><input type="checkbox"/> yes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> no</div>
5		<div><input type="checkbox"/> yes</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> no</div>

Your decision: we give approval ☐ we decline approval ☐ approval is conditional ☐

Conditions that need to be met before approval is given:
.....

Things to check out at the visitors' home:
.....

Advice for the visitors:
.....

Correct responses

1. Unsuitable. A dog needs someone at home nearly all the day and would probably suffer under these conditions, hard though it might seem on a lonely person.
2. They would have to wait for the dog until the fence was fixed since rehomed dogs are particularly likely to escape. The owners should be discouraged from breeding since there is a great over-population of dogs, not all of whom can be found homes. Otherwise likely to be a very suitable home.
3. Service personnel are not usually allowed to adopt dogs since they are likely to be posted to places where dogs can't be kept and animal homes often have to cope in consequence. If they adopt a dog it is quite likely it will have to be put down before it reaches old age.
4. They would be discouraged from buying one – for every exotic pet bought, several died on the way. In addition, terrapins and tortoises are difficult to keep alive – the climate doesn't suit them.
5. Three-quarters of an acre is not enough. The pony would probably kill the fruit trees unless they were protected. The intending owners would need to obtain access to at least two acres and be aware of the cost of keeping ponies in time and money before being allowed to adopt a pony. They would probably be discouraged.
6. This would be considered a happy arrangement subject to the usual checks.
7. It is best not to keep cats if living next to a main road. Any more adopted would probably be run over. Sadly, the offer would be refused.
8. Sounds like an excellent home, but breeding would be discouraged for reasons already mentioned. Some rescue centres neuter all animals for adoption.
9. Cats should never be left to fend for themselves and are less independent than some people think. If they are away that much, pet keeping is not for them. Leaving a cat to fend for itself would be classed as abandonment – a criminal offence!
10. Rabbits ought to have a run for at least part of the day. This one would be a backyard prisoner.
11. Sounds good. Would the run be protected from cats?