

GETTING A PET SITTER FOR YOUR DOG

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

A good professional pet sitter is a true find. Instead of relying on a friend to feed your dog, walk him and spend an hour or so playing with him, you can relax while you're away, knowing that your dog is in capable hands.

A knowledgeable sitter should be able to spot medical problems and handle emergencies - and make your absence less stressful all around. "The pet gets to stay in his own environment," says Lori Jenssen, president of the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS), which lists more than 1,200 members. "He gets to stay in his own house, his own bed. And he gets fed with his own food. And when you get home, your pet is there to greet you."

In fact, she says, some animals get spoiled when their owners are away. "We spend a half hour, but that half hour is 100 percent with the pet. So, when you get home, they're going to expect the same from you."

CHOOSING A SITTER

All of this is good news for pet owners. But how do you choose the best sitter and make sure your pet gets the care you expect? Here are some tips from the NAPPS and other professionals:

- Make sure you're making the right choice in deciding to leave an animal at home alone for most of your time away. For example, if your pet has medical or behavioral problems and needs close supervision, a kennel might be the best option.
- Ask fellow pet owners or your veterinarian, groomer or pet-supply store for referrals or look in the yellow pages. NAPPS' sitter referral line is (800) 296-PETS.
- Know your price range. Sitters charge an average of \$12 per half-hour visit.
- Ask questions. Is the pet sitter bonded? Does he or she carry commercial liability insurance? Ask for documentation. Is the sitter a member of a professional association? How long has he or she been in business? Does the sitter provide references? A service contract?
- Ask more questions. What is the sitter's training background? How extensive is his or her knowledge of medical problems? Has the sitter taken pet health-care seminars or had any training through a pet sitters' group, humane society or other organization? Does the sitter have a backup plan if he or she is unable to make it to your house?
- Expect questions. The best pet sitters will want to know all about your animal, its eating habits, toilet habits, grooming needs, exercise routines, medications, etc. The sitter should also ask for important telephone numbers.
- Have the sitter meet your pet in advance and watch how the sitter interacts with your pet.
- Always leave a telephone number where you can be reached and the number of your veterinarian. Call the sitter if you plan to return early or late.

- Make reservations – the earlier the better – and confirm a day or two before you’re planning to leave.
- Have your own contingency plan, especially during the winter in colder climates. Provide the pet sitter with the name of someone, maybe a neighbor, who can take care of your pet should bad weather or other unexpected circumstances prevent the sitter from getting there.
- Have plenty of supplies on hand.
- Inform the sitter of your pet’s special habits – favorite hiding places, for example, or phobias.
- Give the pet sitter detailed but simple instructions in writing. Leave a measuring cup, for instance, and indicate exactly how much Rover should be fed. A “handful” or “bowlful” doesn’t mean the same thing to everyone. If a pet sitter is not for you, you may want to consider kenneling your dog. For information on kenneling, please click on [Kenneling Your Dog](#).