

Getting a Pet Sitter

- Finding a pet sitter who you like and trust may take time, so begin your search long before your trip.
- To find a pet sitter, ask your veterinarian, favorite pet store, or pet-owning friends for a referral. You can also check the two major professional pet-sitting organizations—the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (www.petsitters.org) and Pet Sitters International (www.petsit.com)—for a list of member pet sitters in your area.
- Professional pet sitters should be bonded and insured.
- Most sitters charge per visit.
- Get everything in writing.

It's important to have someone you trust care for your pet while you're away. Keeping your pet at home in the care of a pet sitter will spare your pet the stress and health risks associated with boarding facilities. A pet sitter will not only feed and play with your pet but also water plants, bring in the mail, and take out the trash. Some sitters may also perform grooming or behavior training. A pet sitter can help your home appear to be lived in, which can deter burglars. If you don't have a neighbor, friend, or relative who can care for your pet when you're away, consider hiring a professional pet sitter. Knowing that your pet is being cared for by a professional pet sitter can add to your peace of mind while you're away.

Finding a Pet Sitter

Finding a pet sitter who you like and trust may take time, so begin your search long before your trip. Pet sitters become booked early, especially during holidays and popular vacation times. If your pet has special needs, such as insulin injections, you'll need to find a sitter who can attend to them.

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The Interview

Prepare your questions in advance. Ask the pet sitter if he or she is bonded and insured; professional sitters should be. Ask what the sitter will do during each visit, and get it in writing. Ask how long the sitter has been in business and what experience he or she has with animals outside of pet sitting. Ask for a written list of references; if the sitter doesn't provide this, look for a different sitter. Make sure to check all references. Ask if the sitter will be the only one caring for your

Questions to Ask a Pet Sitter

- Are you bonded and insured? (Professional sitters should be.)
- What do you do in a visit, and how long does your typical visit last?
- How long have you been in business?
- What experience do you have with animals outside of pet sitting?
- Do you have a written list of references? (If the sitter doesn't provide this, look for a different sitter. Make sure to check all references.)
- Will you be the only one making visits? (The person you interview should be the only one making visits.)
- Will there be a written contract or agreement? (Everything should be in writing.)
- Can you administer my pet's prescribed medication or treatment?

Choices and Considerations

pet; larger services sometimes use various sitters for one client, but the person you interview should be the only one making visits. Ask if there will be a written contract or agreement; everything should be in writing. If your pet requires a prescribed medication or treatment, ask if the sitter can administer it.

The sitter should ask you questions about your pet's care, including feeding, cleaning up, waste disposal, and games/activities/walks that your pet enjoys. Show the sitter where you keep your pet's food, treats, bowls, bags for waste, toys, carrier, leash, and litterbox. Make sure that you have enough food and other supplies to last while you are away. Be prepared to reimburse the sitter if he or she has to purchase necessary supplies while you're away.

Inform the sitter of your pet's illnesses or odd habits. For example, if your pet hides from strangers, where are his or her favorite hiding spots? Does your pet try to escape from the house? Does your pet bite? The sitter will want to see your pet at each visit; seeing an empty food bowl is not enough to confirm that your pet is all right.

A Test Run

If you want to try out a pet sitter before hiring him or her for a long trip, hire the sitter to take care of your pet for one or two visits, even if you don't go away. Don't tell the sitter that you're testing him or her; just say that you have a day trip (which might only be going to work for the day). The sitter's performance will determine whether you use him or her in the future.

Preparing to Leave

When you hire a pet sitter, the sitter will ask you to sign a contract that includes the cost, liabilities, and dates of coverage. Make sure the sitter knows how many visits you'll need. Discuss the terms of payment, including whether payment is required up front. Most sitters charge per visit.

Give the sitter your house key and the name and phone number of someone who has a spare key.

Give the sitter the phone number of where you'll be and the name and phone number of your veterinarian. Make sure the sitter knows where your

Pet-Sitter Organizations

National Association of Professional Pet Sitters

Web site: www.petsitters.org

Email: napps@ahint.com

Phone: 856-439-0324

15000 Commerce Parkway, Suite C

Mt. Laurel, New Jersey 08054

Pet Sitters International

Web site: www.petsit.com

Phone: 336-983-9222

Sittercity

Web site: www.sittercity.com

Phone: 888-748-2489

pet's carrier is in case of an emergency. Sitters must occasionally handle house-related emergencies, so provide the phone number of someone in your area who might be able to help if you are unreachable.

Give your veterinarian a letter stating that while you're away, the sitter has the authority to seek treatment for your pet, and you'll take responsibility for any fees. Give your veterinarian your out-of-town phone number.

Make sure that the sitter gives you his or her contact information. Ask the sitter to call or e-mail you after the first visit to confirm that everything went well. This will reassure you that the sitter has you on his or her schedule. If you don't hear from the sitter within a few hours after the first visit, contact the sitter for confirmation.

Returning

If no one else in your area has your house key, it's a good idea to have the sitter keep it until you've returned. This way, you'll know that the sitter or someone else will be able to care for your pet even if you're delayed. If your return will be delayed, call the sitter to ask if he or she can take care of your pet for the additional time. If the sitter can't cover the extra time, he or she might have a backup sitter. When you return, let the sitter know that you are home.