

A FRIEND FOR KEEPS

As [Petfinder.com](https://www.petfinder.com) celebrates 15 years and 17 million pet adoptions, here's everything you need to know about opening your home to a "forever pet."

Petfinder[™]



Rescue Me!

Adopting a pet is a heartwarming experience. Here's how to make the relationship last a lifetime.

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FTER A WHILE, THE VOLUNTEERS STARTED CALLING IT THE LOVE BELL. It rang every time a pet found a “forever home” during the adopt-a-thon that took place a month after the tornado that devastated Joplin, Mo. on May 22. At the remarkable weekend event in June, just over 1,300 storm-displaced animals—dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, ferrets, potbellied pigs, goldfish, even a yellow conure that flapped its way to the emergency shelter and landed on the shoulder of the local ASPCA director—were adopted or reunited with their families by Sunday night.

“One chocolate Lab arrived with all his toenails torn off after getting swept away in a storm drain,” says Karen Aquino, executive director of the Joplin Humane Soci-

ety. “A young couple came in, and I could see by the joy on their little boy’s face that this was their dog. It turned out the family had lost their home, their vehicles and most of their possessions, but for the moment, we could make their family feel whole again.”

Somebody Ring a Bell!

The Joplin adoption effort was espe-

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- 3 Share your Stories of Love in our online sweepstakes,**** September 1–October 31. We'll donate \$1* to pet adoption organizations nationwide for each pet adoption story and photo uploaded, plus you'll have a chance to win great prizes.

To learn more and enter sweepstakes, go to petco.com/reunion

* Total combined donations by PETCO not to exceed \$10,000.

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BRODY

Adopted April 2009

DID YOU KNOW?

PETCO and the PETCO Foundation have raised over **\$75 million** for animal welfare groups and helped more than **3 million** pets find homes.



After a tornado devastated Joplin, Mo. in May, more than 1,300 household pets were adopted or reunited with their families during a weekend adopt-a-thon.

dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, mice, birds, turtles, horses, pigs and more each year. But Petfinder's latest mission, highlighted by an initiative called

FurKeeps, is to get everyone who adopts a pet (or otherwise adds a new pet into their family), without exception, to see the relationship as one that lasts a lifetime.

More than 20% of people who bring dogs to shelters, for instance, adopted those dogs from a shelter in the first place. That return rate puts a heavy strain on facilities already bursting at the seams. Roughly 5 million to 7 million pets enter animal shelters nationwide every year, and approximately 3 million to 4 million of those are euthanized. That includes 60% of dogs and 70% of cats. "The sad reality is, more than half of all dogs and cats in shelters are destroyed simply because there is no one to adopt them," says Kim Saunders, Petfinder's vice president of shelter outreach and author of *The Adopted Dog Bible*. On a typical day, Petfinder's online, searchable database features more than 350,000 animals in need of homes. "If people knew more about the pet adoption process and how to keep a pet in the home, we could save so many more animal lives—and also make a lot of humans very happy as a result."

Finding the perfect pet companion is the first step [see box below]. Here's how to make the right match last a lifetime.

Setting Expectations

"Every new pet parent goes in intending to

cially meaningful for Petfinder.com, whose charitable foundation gave a grant to offset the cost of hundreds of pet inoculations that weekend. Betsy Banks Saul, Petfinder's co-founder, grew up in Joplin (her mom, Joan, who writes the Petfinder Happy Tails blog, still lives there), where the elementary and high schools she went to were destroyed. "Even now, it's hard to keep a dry eye thinking about the tragedy and how so many people rallied around these loveable animals," Saul says. "Every adoption was a little bit of a miracle."

Of course, the real miracle isn't just adopting a pet; it's keeping him or her forever. As Petfinder celebrates its 15th birthday this year and more than 17 million pet adoptions, the organization continues to help the 13,500 shelter and rescue organizations that make up the Petfinder family, adopting out as many as 2 million

Finding the Perfect Pet



Think Adoption First.

With 3 to 4 million animals needlessly put to death in the U.S. each year, options abound for saving a loveable animal in need at adoption centers and from rescue groups. Go to Petfinder.com to tap a global network of more than 13,500 animal welfare organizations.

Picture Your Dream Pet.

Big? Small? Kid-friendly? Couch potato? Make a list of the qualities you want—and

don't want—in a pet. For instance, are you okay with shedders or lickers? How much time, training and exercise can you provide? Trainer Sue Sternberg advises: "Envision your typical weekend. What you're doing and how your pet would fit in. If your typical weekend is at the mall and movies, then you shouldn't have an eight-week-old active puppy."

Browse Online.

Petfinder.com's database of more than 350,000 adoptable pets is searchable by

animal, breed, size, gender, age and ZIP code. Reading animal descriptions is half the fun.

Be Patient.

Take your time. Ask lots of questions. Consider fostering, pet-sitting or volunteering at a shelter first. In a single week, you can meet 75 dogs or cats, say experts. See which ones appeal and which don't. In general, see which pet adopts you. Careful, though: You might just fall in love.

DANI REVNOLDS

I AM finally home.

The real reward of adopting a dog is when the dog adopts you.

Join IAMS in reaching our goal of 1.5 million pet adoptions this year by opening your heart and your home to a cat or dog in need. You can even help if you already have a pet. For every specially marked bag you buy, we'll donate a bowl of IAMS to the IAMS shelter network.

Starting October 1 you can help us achieve our goal on facebook.com/iams



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keep a pet forever, but then—*whammo!*—reality sets in and you say, ‘Okay, do I have what it takes to keep this pet for 10, 15, maybe 20 years?’” Saul says. The Petfinder co-founder asked herself that question recently after adopting Jake, a rambunctious year-old shepherd she fell in love with at an Arizona shelter. Saul already parents 20 animals, so what was one more, right? Well.... “Even knowing all I know,” she says, “I was surprised when Jake chewed through my phone cord, chased my chickens, terrorized the cat and bolted every time I opened the door.”

Behavioral issues like these are the second most common reason pets are surrendered (moving is the No. 1 reason), according to a Petfinder member survey. Costs are cited next, not surprising during recent economic hard times, followed by pet health issues and aggression.

“A whole new set of challenges emerges once a new pet arrives home, so it’s important to go into pet parenthood with realistic expectations,” says Paul Jolly, a vice president at PETCO and executive director of the PETCO Foundation, the company’s nonprofit arm (petcofoundation.org). In addition to placing homeless animals in forever homes through national adoption events in PETCO stores every month, PETCO and the PETCO Foundation help those caught off-guard by unexpected difficulties.

The company and the foundation created a national Pet Food Bank Program to support pet families during difficult financial times. PETCO stores across the country collect pet food donations, which are then donated to local animal welfare partners and food banks. It’s all part of a program to reduce the number of animals returning to shelters. “No one should ever have to make the heartbreaking decision to give up a pet,” Jolly says. “There’s almost always a solution.”

Three Steps to a Lasting Relationship

Petfinder’s FurKeeps campaign (petfinder.com/FurKeeps) was launched in 2010 to raise awareness about three often overlooked issues essential for a long and happy pet relationship: microchipping, pet insurance and behavior training. “Beyond spaying and neutering, and creating a healthy, loving environment for your pet, these are three things that really strengthen the bond and keep pets in the home,” Saul says.

Start by chipping. According to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy (NCPSP), less than 2% of lost cats and only 15% to 20% of lost dogs are returned to their owners. Among the reunited, almost all are identified with tags, tattoos or microchips. “All the energy and attention we give our animals won’t mean



Like other domestic pets, rabbits should see a vet on a regular basis.

much unless we can track them if they get lost, as one in three pets will,” says Petfinder’s Saunders. Remember, though: Microchipping isn’t enough. Pet parents need to register their pets’ microchip IDs with a registry keeper, which, for a nominal one-time fee, typically provides 24-hour telephone recovery service, good for the life of the pet.

Next is pet insurance, which works much like health insurance does for people: It covers the cost of medical care, from vaccinations and flea treatment to costlier hospital stays and chronic, long-term conditions. “Nobody should have to make medical decisions for their pet based on finances,” says Saunders.

While some companies offer pet insurance, others focus on preventive care packages as part of an overall wellness program. “Keeping a pet healthy is the best thing a person can do to maintain that all-important bond,” says Jeffrey Klausner, DVM, MS, DACVIM and chief medical officer for Banfield Pet Hospital,





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Helping the neediest: Cats and Pit Bulls

Visit a few shelters and you'll start seeing a pattern: cat, pit bull, cat, pit bull. "It's a huge issue for rescue facilities right now," says Petfinder's Kim Saunders. "Cats and pit bulls are a major source of overpopulation in shelters. They both tend to be prolific breeders and they're both misunderstood in their own ways."

Stereotypes abound about pit bulls, of course: They're dangerous with kids. They're "bully breeds." They're the canine equivalent of gangsters. Some homeowner insurance policies won't even allow them, and certain communities have banned the animals.

The truth is, most pit bulls are friendly, loving family companions. "They're physically powerful breeds, for sure, but that certainly doesn't mean they can't be sweethearts who curl up on the couch with you," Saunders says. "They're wonderful pets who face prejudice and discrimination."

In *The Adopted Dog Bible*, Saunders looks at the myths and realities common to the breed. No, there is no unique mechanism in the jaws of pit bulls that makes them lock their jaws. There is also no evidence that pit bulls are more aggressive with people than other dogs. "A boisterous pit bull

may not be right for families with small children or those unprepared to do the necessary training and handling," she says, "but anyone looking for an enthusiastic, energetic breed should look no further."

Cats have a different image problem. "If you see a dog roaming loose, it raises alarms," Saunders says, "but people think cats are fine living outside." That misconception has led to rampant breeding among stray felines, many of whom eventually find their way to already crowded shelters. At least 20% of cats are acquired as strays. Many were lost pets who were not kept properly indoors or provided with identification. The average number of litters a fertile cat produces is one to two a year, with an average litter of four to six kittens. Spaying and neutering fixes that problem, but adoption makes the biggest difference of all.

"We owe it to these beautiful animals to give them the love and care they deserve," Saunders says. "Open up your home and become a real hero."

a network of 770 animal hospitals. "Make the veterinarian your pet's best friend. Twice-annual comprehensive exams and asking medical questions as they arise go a long way toward preventing bigger health problems down the road."

Above all, behavior training assures that pets and their families live happily ever after. More than a few new pet parents discover—as Betsy Saul did with Jake—that the furry new addition isn't a natural team player at first. Training really matters. "People deserve a sociable pet, but good behavior doesn't happen by accident," says Sue Sternberg, a dog trainer who runs a pilot initiative funded by the Petfinder Foundation called Train to Adopt (petfinderfoundation.com/train-to-adopt/). The Petfinder.com Foundation provides lifesaving support to Petfinder shelter and rescue groups. Thanks to this funding, at shelters in Philadelphia; Tucson, Ariz.; St. Louis, Mo.; and Charlotte, N.C., Sternberg is working with shelter and rescue professionals to train pets *before* they're adopted.

"We're teaching techniques to make pets more adoptable, but they're the same techniques people can use at home when the new pet arrives," Sternberg says. A little training goes a long way. "Literally 10 minutes a day can create an animal who's more pleasant to live with."

Sternberg says dogs in particular should know three essential commands: to sit, to come when called and to pay attention to the pet parent on command. It doesn't matter whether these are taught independently or in a training class (they can be taught using treats, affection and life rewards, like going for a walk or playtime). The main point is to prevent and solve common behavior issues that keep pets from being treated like one of the family and sometimes lead to their return. "Training creates an inexplicable connection between species, which is what makes it so magical," Sternberg says. "Adopted animals don't need pity or someone to figure out the bad things that happened in their past. They need someone to say, 'This is your fresh start, here are the rules and here's how we can share this joyous experience together.'"



I AM finally home.

The real reward of adopting a cat is when the cat adopts you.

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Even Jake learned to play well with others. Says Saul, "A few treats, some snuggles and love, and, hey! Jake's not chasing my chickens anymore!"

Starting Off on the Right Paw

Each year during the holidays, Iams partners with the Helen Woodward Animal Center, Petfinder and other organizations to find homes for adoptable pets. The Iams Home 4 the Holidays campaign (facebook.com/Iams) has placed more than 5.8 million animals from shelters, rescues and adoption centers since the drive launched in 1999 at the Helen Woodward Animal Center in San Diego County, Calif. The program started with only 14 local shelters and today includes more than 3,500 animal organizations in 15 countries.

"By educating yourself about adoption, you're not caught off-guard by the 101 things that happen when you get a new pet," says Leslie Myrie, Iams assistant brand manager in charge of Home 4 the Holidays. Iams provides anyone adopting a pet with a free adoption kit that includes a New Pet Care Guide with information on proper nutrition, health, training and pet development.

Last year, Iams Home 4 the Holidays spotlighted real-life "Adoption Angels" with videos, photos and blog posts at Iams.com, along with ongoing updates on Facebook and Twitter. Jack Nazarian chronicled his early days as the pet parent of Jane, a sweet four-month-old golden-brown vizsla mix he welcomed to his New York apartment. Visitors to the Iams Facebook page and website followed Jack and Jane through house training, obedience class and vet visits, and on serious runs through the park (Nazarian is a triathlete). More than anything, though, it was an account of how truly life-changing adopting a pet can be. As Jane curled up on her new puppy pillow one night, Nazarian wrote: "I look at Jane sometimes and think: She rescued me. She helps balance me out and slow me down.... She is so loving, friendly, playful, well behaved and beautiful. We've got more training to do, but we're off to a really good start, and for that I'm really grateful."

A Year to Celebrate

When Petfinder.com launched in 1996, the World Wide Web was still mostly a novelty, but Betsy Saul and her then-husband, Jared, sensed its far-reaching potential. Their love for animals led them to create an online adoption site searchable by animal, breed, size, gender, age and ZIP code. "The goal when we started was saving one life per month," says Saul. "That would have been enough to keep us going."

Three dozen different breeds of birds are available for adoption on Petfinder.com.



Jack Nazarian, a triathlete, and Jane, his adopted vizsla mix, take a break during one of their runs in the park.

Fifteen years later, Petfinder.com is the largest searchable database of homeless pets on the Internet and helped adopt out 2.1 million animals last year. More than 5 million people per month rely on Petfinder's search services and access to more than 200 training videos. The website has helped shatter myths (Did you know 25% of shelter dogs are pure-bred?) and greatly reduce the number of euthanasia deaths.

It's times like the Joplin adopt-a-thon (co-hosted by the ASPCA and the Joplin Humane Society) that Saul appreciates just how far Petfinder has come. Not so long ago, it would have been next to impossible to find homes for 2,000 animals in a single weekend. Thanks to a massive database, blog posts, Facebook and Twitter updates, and animal-loving supporters everywhere, Petfinder helped draw adoption families from 24 states to Saul's disaster-stricken hometown.

"It was one of the most successful and surprising adoption events I can remember," Saul says, pausing a moment to think about it. "Actually, it wasn't completely surprising. After 15 years and 17 million adoptions, I know how incredibly powerful the relationship and love is between people and their pets. It never fails to touch my heart." 🐾

—David Hochman



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