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**PetsMatter** is your bi-monthly dose of pet health, behavior and lifestyle articles from veterinary professionals. **PetsMatter** delivers the inside scoop with experts' credibility and a personal touch. Read stories about pet owners just like you; engage your kids in the fun activities each issue features; and most of all, learn how you can give your pets a happy, healthy life.

## No Pets Allowed: Renting with Pets

By Jen Reeder

Anna-Marija Helt would never move into a home that didn't allow her beloved pets. So, over the years, she's learned ways to increase the chances that her pets will be welcome. When searching for an apartment to rent in San Francisco with her black lab, Zoe, she created a "doggie resume" with references and factoids, such as "housebroken" and "friendly," and included "a really cute picture." One time, she and Zoe were accepted just by paying an additional deposit, but another time, the owner was on the fence about allowing dogs on his property when they spoke on the phone.

"He let it slip that he had a lab when he was a kid, so we figured bringing Zoe would be a slam dunk," Helt says. "She had him wrapped around her paw in 2 minutes flat. He lived above us, and by the end of that first meeting, he asked if he'd be 'allowed' to take her out for walks when we were at work."

Helt was fortunate, but most pet owners know finding an apartment or house to rent that allows pets can be a challenge — particularly with cats and dogs, because owners worry about potential property damage, odors and noise.

In a survey by the National Association of Independent Landlords (562 respondents), 42% of landlords reported they do not allow pets. Of the 58% who do, only 6% had no restrictions; 52% require a larger security deposit; and 30% impose height, weight or breed restrictions.

"Of course, pets do damage properties, unfortunately," says Tracey Benson, president of the National Association of Independent Landlords, a group with over 40,000 members nationwide.

Benson once rented to people who locked their dog in a bathroom; when he tried to get out, he tore off the door and then damaged the carpet.

"I had a bad experience, but I love pets, so I encourage people to rent to pets — but get a good security deposit to cover any damages," she says.

Lili Cory, a licensed realtor with Realty Executives Desert Lifestyles in La Quinta, Calif., specializes in annual leases. She encourages property owners to allow pets because it helps fill the home faster.

"When I talk to an owner who says 'no pets,' I really try to discourage them because first off: economics," Cory says. "If someone is dead set against renting to pets, I tell them, 'you just reduced your chances of renting the property substantially,' which is true."

Cory says that it is easy to place pets like lizards, birds, hamsters and fish, but cats and dogs are another story. Sometimes, homeowner associations have a 25-pound limit for dogs and allow a maximum of two pets. It can be virtually impossible to get renter's insurance for certain perceived "aggressive" breeds like pit bulls, another deterrent for potential landlords.

To help convince landlords to allow pets, Cory suggests applicants submit references, a photo of their pet, any obedience school certificates and current shot records, and even bringing the pet to meet the owner. Volunteering to pay a refundable pet deposit, typically \$250 to \$500, can also help. People with multiple pets can explain that they will keep each other company, playing together to avoid the boredom that can lead to property damage.

"Pets add so much to the quality of life," Cory says. "You don't want to have to give up your pet."

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Most importantly, once the lease is signed, be a responsible pet owner. It only takes one bad experience to make a property owner permanently decide on a "no pets" policy.

That's what happened to Texas resident Eleanor Blain, who rented a property in Houston with a two-pet limit to a woman who said she had two Chihuahuas — but she actually had 11.

"She used the house as a kennel," Blain says. "Damage to the house was extensive. The urine soaked into the tiled floors, wood paneling and doors, and it took 1 year for the smell to leave the house. Only after 1 year of repeated deodorizing could I lease it again. I will no longer have any pets in that house.... No pets. Period."

Ultimately, it comes down to common decency. Potential renters should supply actual references — not a friend posing as a former landlord — and be responsible for their pets, Benson says.

"They should be honest with their landlords, only have a pet if they're allowed, and take care of the place like it's their own."

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*Freelance journalist Jen Reeder sustained some damage to her desk when her lab puppy Rio tried to distract her from writing this article.*



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