

Ten Ways You Can Help Solve Pet Overpopulation

Each year millions of unwanted pets arrive at animal shelters. In the Denver Metro area alone, nearly 70,000 animals are cared for in shelters annually. However, there's not enough room to accommodate the number of animals brought to shelters. Sadly, the most humane option is to euthanize those animals that cannot find homes. The following are ways that you can help prevent this tragedy.

1. Spay or Neuter Your Pet

Neutered pets often live longer, healthier lives than unaltered animals. They also make better companion animals, as they are less likely to show territorial, dominance, maternal and inter-male aggression. Dogs and cats can be neutered as early as eight weeks old. There are low-cost spay neuter clinics that can help you with this.

2. Make Sure He's Wearing His Ticket Home

Are your cats and dogs wearing identification tags? Thousands of animals are brought into shelters each year without identification, and consequently, may never find their way back home. Even less fortunate than these animals are those that end up living on the streets and are faced with disease, starvation and painful death. Identification tags are crucial protection for your pets! New technology in the form of a "microchip," has also brought us an additional identification option. A microchip is a tiny computer chip that is inserted between a cat or dog's shoulder blades. This chip is coded with a number that is detected when the animal is scanned. The shelter can then contact the manufacturer and find out who the owner is. However, microchipping your animal doesn't replace the need for a collar and tags!

3. Fall in Love and Keep that Fire Burning

Adopting a pet is a commitment for life. Our pets can live for many years and it's important for us to make sure they're well cared for, healthy and happy. Our pets are our family, and just like we look after our other family members, we need to do the same for our furry friends.

4. Follow Your Heart to the Shelter

If you're looking to adopt a pet into your family, why not go to your local animal shelter? Shelters have wonderful pets that are waiting to be loved. Whether it's a purebred or a mixed breed, many of the pets available for adoption are already house-trained and know some basic obedience skills. Patronizing pet stores only adds to the overpopulation problem. Most pet stores receive their puppies from puppy mills that breed these animals strictly for financial gain, with no thought to their health and welfare.

5. Keep that Lovin' Feline Indoors

Cats are better off living indoors because of all of the dangers that are present in the great outdoors. Cars, poison and aggressive animals are all problems that your cat is likely to run into if he is allowed to roam. Thousands of cats end up in shelters every year because their owners thought they were doing the "right" thing by letting their cats wander outside. Cats will enjoy living inside your home if you provide them with the appropriate toys, climbing options, play time and attention. A cat who lives indoors can live an average of 15-20 years, while an outdoor cat may only live three to five years.

6. An Educated Dog is a Happier Dog

Make sure to spend the time to train your dog. Obedience training is just as essential as a proper diet and exercise. Obedience classes offer the opportunity to structure your dog's environment and help

them to know what's expected of them. Well-trained dogs are less likely to escape, cause problems in your neighborhood, and most importantly will not be given up because of behavioral problems.

7. Give an Animal a Chance

Did you notice that your neighbor is sick and having a hard time taking care of her pet? Why not help her out a few times a week, instead of letting the situation resolve itself as a relinquishment at an animal shelter or even worse, on the streets. Did you notice a dog or cat running loose in your neighborhood? Why not try to bring that animal to a shelter. Not only will you save that animal's life, but you'll prevent more litters of unwanted puppies or kittens from being born.

8. Know Their Needs

It's the responsibility of prospective pet owners to educate themselves about what type of pet would best suit their lifestyle and needs. Too many pets are relinquished because "he got too big," or "she's too energetic." Knowing your breed-type means knowing such things as how large they'll get, how much exercise they'll need and what types of personality traits they may have.

9. Put Your Money and Your Time Where it Counts

To end pet overpopulation we must be willing to make some changes in our daily lives. Where we shop for our pet supplies can make a big difference. By choosing stores that don't sell pets you can make a statement to not support puppy mills. You can support your local animal shelter by participating in its fundraisers. Not only will you have a great time, but you will be supporting its programs to curb the overpopulation crisis. Volunteering at your local animal shelter will help countless animals receive the attention and support that they need. Volunteering can include anything from walking dogs, to working on fundraising committees, to educating the community about responsible pet ownership. You can also support youth groups that are organizing food and supply drives for your local animal shelter. Every little bit helps to make a difference!

10. Spread the Word

It's up to all of us to educate our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow students about the ways that we can work together to prevent pet overpopulation. Whether it's a bumper sticker on your car, a few kind words to a neighbor, or inviting your local animal shelter educator to speak to your school or business, every little bit helps. If the pet overpopulation problem is to be solved, we need to be the ones to do it!