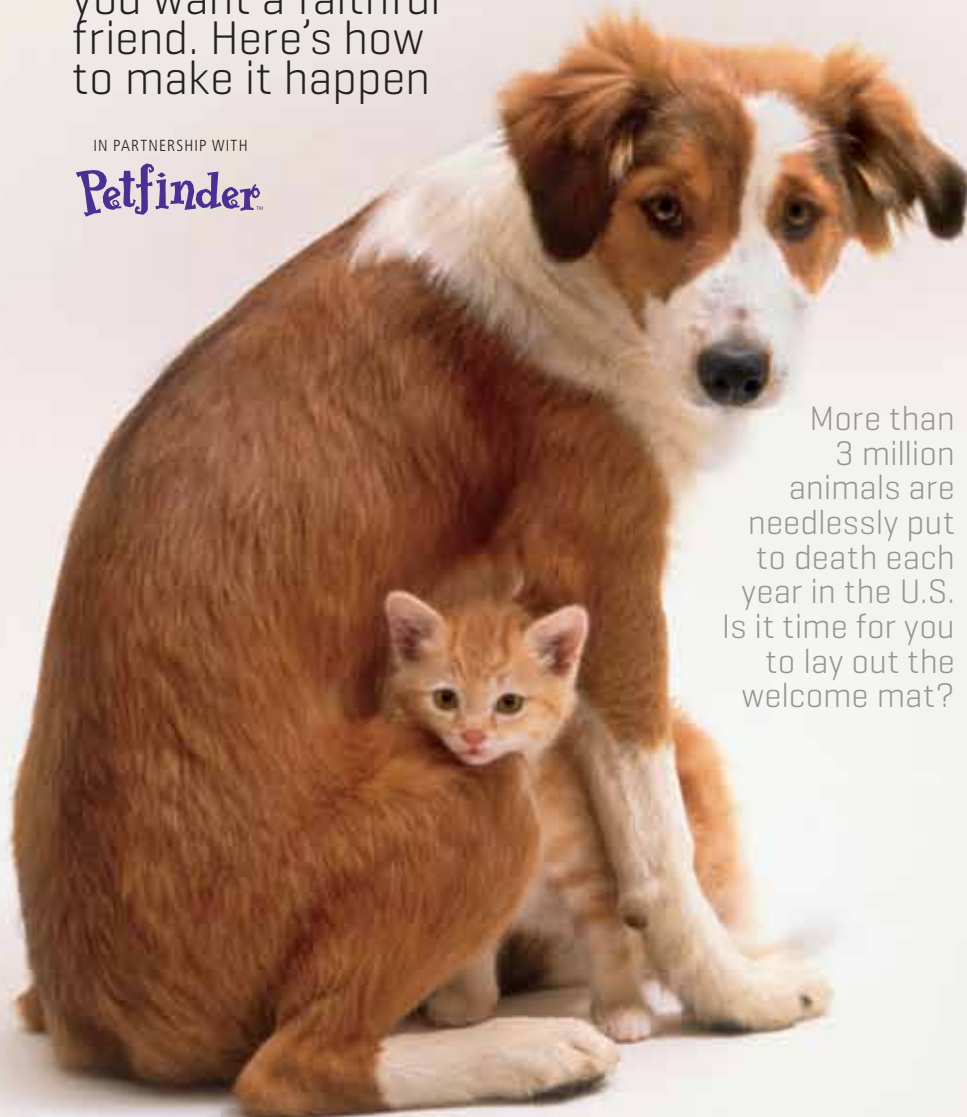


# A Pet Parent's Guide to Adoption

Opening up your home to an orphaned pet can inject powerful love into your life. They need homes, you want a faithful friend. Here's how to make it happen

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**Petfinder**



More than 3 million animals are needlessly put to death each year in the U.S. Is it time for you to lay out the welcome mat?

**P**etfinder.com started with a modest goal: save the life of one animal per month. Within a few weeks of its inception, however, co-founder Betsy Saul was sucker punched by reality. "People started sending faxes and e-mails about pets in hard conditions," says Saul. "There was a boxer in Newark, tied to a street lamp, the collar grinding into his neck as kids beat him with sticks. I thought, 'I don't know if I can do this.' It was gut-wrenching." As she

slept, Saul's mind was infiltrated by visions. "But what I saw wasn't the kids beating the dog," she says. "Instead I saw a heroine, screeching to a stop in her Pinto, untying the dog and taking him to a local shelter—saving that dog. It was the first time I realized that if you get deeply enough involved in something, there is power in that."

Saul, who now runs Petfinder.com, and her then husband Jared, conceived the website while driving one day in 1995, just spit-balling ideas about the potential of the Internet. They set the one-life-per-month goal as a benchmark so they'd know they weren't spinning their wheels. "Now we're saving around 200,000 a month," says Saul. "I guess we reached that goal." Since 1995, Saul has seen the annual number of animals who are euthanized drop from 16 million per year to 3 to 4 million. Lives—those of animals and people—are changed every step of the way.

"Our mission is to make sure that every adoptable pet can find a home," says Kim Saunders, author of *The Adopted Dog Bible* and vice president of shelter outreach for Petfinder.com. It's a mission taken seriously. As she speaks, Saunders is working out the logistics of moving 100 dogs, collateral victims of the gulf oil spill who would otherwise be euthanized, from Louisiana to New Jersey. Grants provided by the Petfinder.com Foundation are making this possible.

Whether you're looking for a dog, cat or nearly any

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HOME

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

PETCO and the PETCO Foundation have raised over **\$64 million** for animal welfare groups and helped more than **2.8 million** pets find homes.



BAILEY

Adopted June 2009

“Twenty-five percent of the animals in shelters are purebred, so you don’t have to go to a breeder or pet store to find a particular breed. It’s easier to find one for adoption than you might think.”



imaginable animal to add to your family, Petfinder.com is the easiest and most efficient way to find adoptable pets in your area. Through its relationships with more than 13,000 member shelters and rescues, the free website and searchable database helped 2 million pets—including horses, rabbits, guinea pigs, you name it—find new homes in 2009.

Here’s a quick guide to familiarize you with the process of successfully adopting a pet into your family—giving him or her the gift of a forever home and yourself the gift of unconditional love.

**Think adoption first.** “Three to four million animals are needlessly put to death each year in the U.S.,” says Jim Myers, CEO of PETCO, which funds more than 6,500 non-profit animal welfare groups through its PETCO Foundation (Petcofoundation.org). “We strongly recommend to

people looking for a pet that they adopt an animal in need. We’ve never sold cats or dogs, and love having adoption activity take place in our stores. It’s an integral part of our corporate culture. Anyone who’s ever had a pet knows it’s a rewarding relationship, and that experience is heightened by making a difference in the life of a pet that was going down a bad path.”

Many new pet parents write about their experiences in Petfinder.com’s “Happy Tail” section. There, Heather from Richmond, Va., backs up what Myers says. “Cleo is 18 months old, a Savannah/tabby mix,” says Heather. “I adopted her in May from a pet store that hosts vet cat adoptions. When I was looking at the kittens next to her cage, she hopped over and looked at me like, ‘You don’t need a kitten, you need me!’ After I found out she’d been

tossed in a dumpster taped up in a box, my heart melted. I had to have her, and she is a major sweetheart.”

**Be patient. You can find your perfect match.** “There’s a pet for everyone, but we realize that every pet isn’t right for every person,” says Saunders. “Twenty-five percent of the animals in shelters are purebred, so you don’t have to go to a breeder or pet store to find a particular breed. It’s easier to find one for adoption than you might think.”

“Our family was looking for a boxer/Lab type of puppy,” writes Lindsey of Bay City, Mich., in a “Happy Tail” on Petfinder.com. “We preferred to find a puppy mixed with one of those breeds. After about a month of looking, we found Naya about two hours from our home. She was the best of both worlds—a puppy and boxer/Lab mixed. She was three

months old. I could tell she’d been abused, but I could also see she just wanted to be loved. She is now the best dog I’ve ever had, and is already a part of our family at just six months old.”

**Know thyself.** When you’re matchmaking, keep in mind what type of person you are. “This is the hardest part,” says Saunders, “because people have trouble envisioning themselves a certain way. If you’re a couch potato, a young Labrador retriever may not be your best choice. With dogs, you can get some sense of what they’re like from their heritage, so research that, but always meet the individual. Some dogs require grooming. Others don’t but shed a lot. And size matters, too. Big dogs are often calmer than little ones, but if you’re five feet tall and live in a small apartment, do you really want a St. Bernard? With cats, it’s a little

# Make his HOMECOMING even **HAPPIER.**

Sometimes, adopted pets need a little extra help overcoming the stress of moving to a new home. Their anxiety can lead to behaviors like chewing and inappropriate marking.

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easier. It's just a question of matching your personalities. Do you want a doglike cat or a more aloof cat-like cat?"

**Know what to expect.** "After you do your research and matchmaking, think it over," says Myers of PETCO. "Having a pet shouldn't be an impulse thing. It's a long-term commitment. Think about how your lifestyle will mesh with the pet's needs. You need the time and space to properly care for your new friend. There's also some cost involved, although it's far more economical to adopt a pet than to buy one. Typically there's just a donation involved as opposed to many hundreds or thousands of dollars. Still, it's an investment. There are vaccinations involved, food and other supplies, in some cases grooming, depending upon the animal."

**Welcome your new family member.** One initial concern with a new pet is, "What do I feed the animal?" First off, resist the temptation to

overfeed. "Obesity is a major problem for both dogs and cats," says Paige Marshall, assistant brand manager for Procter & Gamble Pet Care, which along with the Helen Woodward Animal Center sponsors "Iams Home 4 the Holidays" (iamshome4theholidays.com), a seasonal adoption drive that has found new homes for more than 4.6 million animals since 1999. "To get off on the right foot with your new pet, establish a routine: feed them twice a day, and give them plenty of water and exercise. If possible, feed your pet at mealtime; this will help them feel like part of the family. Feeding your pets premium foods is important to promote their health and well-being. Premium foods include prebiotics and offer a variety of choices formulated for each stage of life. When you switch foods, make sure you gradually decrease one and increase the other over five to seven days."

You'll also want to keep an eye on how your pet is acting. "A third of all pets are relinquished because of perceived behavioral issues," says Caryn Stichler, vice president of marketing for Sergeant's Pet Care Products. "Behavioral issues tend to be exacerbated in a new environment. You might see the results of separation anxiety when you're gone, things like chewing, barking, or refusing to eat or drink. In cats you'll see more antisocial behavior such as hissing, scratching or territorial marking."

To that end, Sergeant's conducted clinical studies using pheromone collars on dogs with severe behavioral issues. Over 70% of dogs' stress-induced behaviors were minimized or eliminated. Results of a similar study on cats were even more dramatic. The company has also done groundbreaking research with pheromone collars on endangered African wild dogs. The

results in a nutshell: Within a month, pack politics found their equilibrium and aggression waned. Larry Nouvel, the brains behind the pheromone collar development, says it is based on "appeasing pheromones thought to be found in all mammals, secreted at the time mothers are pregnant to calm animals in the womb. The pheromones aren't a miracle product, but they help."

One final thing you'll undoubtedly notice if you're a new pet parent is hair—sometimes lots of it. In a recent survey conducted for the vacuum cleaner company Hoover by The NPD Group, Inc., nearly 70% of respondents with pets said they didn't have the pet hair situation under control and on average spent more than an hour per week dealing with it. "Bringing home a new pet is like bringing home a new child," says Allyson Horst, director of brand marketing for Hoover. "There are some essentials

Matches made in heaven: When looking for an animal to adopt, choose one that suits your personality and lifestyle. Then slowly introduce them to each member of the family.



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you need to be prepared. Vacuums on the market today have pet-hair-specific features that weren't available five years ago. Some have more suction channels, and new attachments so the hair actually gets sucked in rather than sticking to a brush. And carbon filters can help reduce the odor associated with pet hair. Some new filters can just be rinsed out, and HEPA filters offer a higher grade of filtration."

**Meet the family.** Introduce your pet to each family member slowly and quietly, says Saunders. "Remember, the pet doesn't know yet that this is her new family, and meeting a lot of people at once could be overwhelming." Show

your pet where to find food and water, and where she will sleep. Revisit these important spots several times during the day as a reminder. You can find all you need to know about potty training and other training by clicking "Training" on the Petfinder.com homepage.



**Keep your pet healthy and safe.** "The goal with your new pet is to elevate them to the level of a family member, and, like families, when you have a behavior or health problem, you don't get rid of someone, you work it out," says Saunders. Pet insurance (there are

links on Petfinder.com) is an excellent guard against unexpected health costs, and Petfinder.com's Chip FurKeeps program can help with the ins and outs of getting your pet microchipped. "Ninety percent of pets who get lost don't make it home," says Saunders. "But with microchipping, we've seen pets returned up to four years after getting lost." Talk to your vet about the procedure. After all, if technology can help you find your way from Houston to St. Paul, it's worth letting it help you find a family member. ●

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