

BE A RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNER!



Take another look at the headline above. It could just have easily said, "Be good to your dog" or "Be ~~good~~ good to your neighbors." After all, that's what being a responsible dog owner really means!

Keep Your Dog Healthy

Let's start with the basics: food and water, shelter, exercise, training, and veterinary care. The food and water part is a cinch; all you have to remember is that, like you, dogs need a good diet to stay healthy. Just ask your veterinarian for advice on feeding your pet a regular, nutritionally balanced diet.

Giving your pet proper shelter is easy too. Dogs aren't called house pets for nothing; inside the house is where they belong. A fenced yard with a doghouse is always nice to have, especially for large and active dogs, but dogs should never be left outside alone for long periods of time. Dogs crave and require companionship and they should stay inside with the family whenever possible.

As far as exercise goes, most dog owners find that simply spending time with their companion, playing with him and walking him at least twice a day will keep him in top shape. This will be as rewarding for you as it is for the dog!

If your new companion hasn't yet been trained, enrolling him in obedience classes is a good idea. Training your dog teaches both discipline and kindness and will help prevent behavioral problems that can crop up down the road.

Finally, you'll want to help your pet stay healthy through regular check-ups by your veterinarian. Good health care means that pets stay up-to-date on shots and have any illnesses promptly treated. If you don't yet have a veterinarian for your dog, you can check with the shelter or ask a pet-owning friend for a referral.

A One-time Surgery, A Lifetime Benefit

"Spaying" and "neutering" are words you're probably familiar with. What you may be surprised to hear is that having your female dog spayed or your male dog neutered is the single most important step you can take to be a responsible pet owner.

To spay your female dog is to have her ovaries and uterus surgically removed. To neuter your male dog is to have his testicles removed. The result of both operations is that your companion will no longer be able to bring more homeless animals into the world. That's pretty important when you consider that nearly eight million dogs and cats must be humanely destroyed each year because there are not enough homes for them all.

Spaying and neutering are also better for your pet. Spaying eliminates the possibility of uterine or ovarian cancer and generally reduces the incidence of breast cancer, particularly when your dog is spayed before her first estrous cycle. Neutering reduced the incidence of prostate cancer and prostate disorders. Neutered pets are also less likely to bite, run away or get into fights. To top it all off, dogs

who are spayed or neutered not only live longer, healthier lives, but also make better, more affectionate companions.

Spaying or neutering is a one-time surgery with a one-time cost. But both procedures offer a lifetime of benefits. When it comes right down to it, if you can't afford to have your dog spayed or neutered, then you can't afford to have a dog.

Obey the Law, Protect Your Pet

No matter how careful most dog owners are, there is always a chance their companion may become lost and if that happens a dog who is not protected by a license, collar and identification tag may be plain out of luck.

Don't make the mistake too many pet owners make. License your dog and put an ID tag on him before a problem occurs.

First of all, an up-to-date license and rabies tag are required by law in most cities and counties. The shelter will have more information about local laws, where you can obtain tags and where you can have your pet vaccinated for rabies.

Secondly, a collar and tag are a lost dog's ticket home. The tags should include the license number, your address and daytime and evening telephone numbers.

Exercise Restraint

A valid license and ID tag are important, but not excuse for letting your dog be a menace to your neighbors. A dog who roams the neighborhood, chases cars, bicycles and joggers, soils the neighbor's yard, knocks over trash cans or barks incessantly is a dog with an irresponsible owner.

An essential rule to follow is this: off property, on leash. When not confined to your property, either inside the house or in a secure, fenced yard, your dog must be under control.

Remember that you are responsible for any damage, accidents and bites caused by your companion and you should always pick up after your dog, regardless of where he decides to do his business.



A Lifetime Commitment

You'll undoubtedly fall in love with your new companion right away, but don't forget he'll be with you for the rest of his life. Dogs who are tied out in the backyard for long periods of time, crated inside all day while their owners are at work or exercised only at their owner's convenience are dogs who are being neglected and who are more likely to develop serious behavior problems.

A pet is yours to love and care for from the day he arrives until the day he dies. It's up to you to provide him with a "lifetime guarantee."

Do be good to your dog and be good to your neighbors. If you follow the rules of responsible pet ownership you will be rewarded with the many joys of having a dog by your side.