

Rentals and Pets:

Tips for Landlords and Tenants

By Lori Jo Oswald

I remember when I moved to Oregon to graduate school and had to live in my car with my two big dogs, Bob and Dane, and my cat, Emily, for several weeks while I tried to find a rental. Fortunately, I finally did find one that allowed pets. After 2 years as her tenant, as I was moving, she handed me back my “nonrefundable” pet deposits, telling me that me and my pets had been the best tenants she’d ever had, and the house and yard looked better than it had when I moved in. But even with that wonderful experience, I was to find over and over how difficult it is to find a rental that allows pets, especially when I had added three stray cats to my “family.” Many of us pet owners have struggled with finding rentals that allow pets. We hope these two articles help provide you and potential landlords with tips that will guide you in your search for a home. It seems the worst, most unnecessary reason for abandoning pets at the “pound” is “Moving. Landlord won’t allow pets.” Somehow, even if it required living in the car for a few weeks at a time, I have always eventually found a rental.

More and more landlords are enforcing a “No Pets” policy when faced with renting to pet owners. The Peninsula Humane Society of San Mateo offers the following suggestions on ways renters with pets can approach the problem of a “No Pets” policy:

- --BE HONEST with the landlord! The landlord will find out that you have a “secret” pet, or that you have three cats instead of one.
- --When seeking a new place to rent, discuss your pet with the rental agent or landlord. Landlords are more likely to rent to a pet owner who can prove that the animal has been spayed or neutered, is housebroken, or is small enough to fit into apartment life happily. Another factor that will work in your favor is if someone is home during the day to care for the animal.
- --Ask the landlord if you may introduce him or her to your pet. A well-behaved pet may be able to convince the landlord when all talk fails.
- --If you have rented with your pet before, produce letters from your previous landlord indicating that you did act responsibly with your pet.
- --Offer to negotiate an addendum to the rental agreement or lease, indicating exactly what your landlord will expect of you and your pet, and agree in writing to pay a specified additional security deposit to cover the cost of any pet-related damages.
- --Offer to accept a short-term trial rental period, during which the landlord can see if you and your pet will be acceptable long-term tenants.
- --If the landlord agrees to rent to you and your pet, be sure to get all the specifics down in writing. Anyone can have a change of heart, so make sure that a landlord’s change of heart does not result in an unplanned change of residence for you!
- --If you decide to adopt a pet while renting, discuss it with your landlord first. If your landlord says “No” to a dog, he or she may say “Yes” to a cat.
- --If you find a landlord who will accept you and your pet, the most important responsibility you have next to the loving care of your pet is to set an excellent example to your landlord. Do not allow your pet to damage the rental in any way. Keep your dog from barking and keep your cat from roaming. If your pet causes any property damage, tell your landlord immediately. Pay for the damage and make all arrangements to repair it.
- --Remember, only the responsible pet owner can turn the tide in favor of a “Welcome Pets” rental policy.

Checklist for Landlords for Screening Pet Owning Tenants

By Peninsula Humane Society, San Mateo, CA

The potential tenant who answers yes to all these questions should be a perfect pet owner, says the Peninsula Humane Society. And a responsible pet owner will almost certainly make a responsible tenant. These questions are offered to help guide you in opening up your rentals—and hearts—to pet owners.

1. Is the pet spayed or neutered? (A spayed or neutered pet is less likely to wander, fight, spray, attract other animals, or create a nuisance.)
2. Is the pet housebroken? (For cats this is no problem but dogs need to be housebroken and the owner should take the dogs for walks or arrange for a friend or neighbor to do so.)
3. Does the pet have all its current shots? (A pet owner who keeps a pet updated on shots ranks high as a responsible pet owner.)
4. Has the pet owner rented with a pet before? (Ask to see a letter of recommendation from or call the previous landlord.)
5. Does the owner travel a lot? (If the pet owner plans to be out of town find out how the pet will be provided for during his/her absence.)
6. Does the pet owner have a regular veterinarian? (This shows responsible ownership, and you can call the veterinarian for a recommendation.)
7. Is the pet owner willing to pay an additional pet deposit? (A responsible pet owner will be willing to do so because he/she knows the pet won't cause any damage.)
8. If the pet is a dog, is it trained? (You can ask to meet the pet in person and observe how it responds to commands.)
9. How old is the pet? (A 10-year-old pooch or 12-year-old kitty will be no trouble at all—in fact, it will probably spend most of its time sleeping.)
10. Does the dog owner have a “pooper scooper”? (Responsible dog owners clean up after their dogs.)
11. Does the dog have a current license tag? (Obeying the law is another positive sign of a responsible pet owner.)

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