

On the Move

Cat owners face a challenge when finding a home to rent. Here's how to make your cat attractive to landlords.

Home is where the heart is and within our homes and hearts live our cats. When we search for a new place to hang our hat, we face the challenge of finding a home that allows our hearts delight, our cats, to be with us. Sometimes, the difficulties people have finding a new home for themselves and their cats seem hopeless, and cats end up not only with a new home, but a new owner as well.

Catherine Hogan, an animal rescuer in Eureka, Mo., is one of hundreds of shelter workers who foster cats when owners can no longer keep them. Hogan said that relocating and can't take the cat tops her list of reasons why people give up their cats.

This is particularly a problem for the elderly, said Luci Koizumi, a columnist who researched this subject for the Reston Observer in Reston, Va. I can't forget the sad case of an elderly woman whose terminally ill husband purchased a condominium for her to move into upon his death. When he died, she found that the building did not accept pets.

Fortunately, Koizumi said, many senior facilities are becoming more aware of the benefit pets have on older residents and are making accommodations.

So, rather than giving up before you start, learn what it takes for you and your furry family to find the perfect home.

How Landlords Think

The last thing a landlord wants to face is destruction of their property by renters. Property owners often have a reason to be cautious of prospective tenants who have pets.

Rhonda Wiler, DVM, of Half Moon Bay, Calif., remembers her experience renting a mobile home when she was a veterinary student. The lady before me had pretty much moved out, but left her four cats to fend for themselves, Wiler said. There were cat feces covering every horizontal surface in the kitchen, especially the stove. I had to remove every carpet in the house and paint sealant on the floor. The smell was indescribable.

This is the kind of scenario landlords don't want to ever have to deal with. It is not the animals that are to blame. Circumstances like this one make it hard on everyone in the housing market.

I think it is a matter of responsibility, Wiler said, who, a decade later, has become a landlord and rents to people with pets. I look at the way potential renters interact with their pets as an indicator. If they take good care of their pet, can show me they get regular veterinary care and have a good relationship with their veterinarian, I find them generally to be responsible people.

The Purr-Fect Tenant

Its never been easy to find a rental for my fur-family and myself, said Kathy Matejka of Colorado Springs, Colo. However, there are some proven strategies that have always been useful to me.

First, Matejka said that she creates a resume for her cats, which includes photographs, details about the cats, a record of previous landlords going back at least 10 years and a history of rent payments and good tenantry. She also said that she collects business cards and documents from her veterinarians to show that she's serious about her cats well-being.

Second, when Matejka moves, she asks her landlords for reference letters that address her pets' behavior. I've always made it a point to leave a dwelling in the same or better condition than I've found it in, she said. I've taken my pet ownership responsibilities seriously.

Third, it is imperative to keep tabs on your cats behavior. The sooner you address problems, the better, said Pam Johnson-Bennett, cat behaviorist and author of Cat vs. Cat. You can't take a cat you have allowed to tear up your space for five years and expect to turn it around overnight when you have to move. The earlier you start training and getting good habits established, the better off you will be.

Your Home is Their World

Basic biological needs for an animal go beyond just food and water. Stressed animals may try to remodel their environment to one that more suits their needs or respond with other stress-related behaviors. The best way to prevent cats from damaging a home is to understand their needs and provide for them.

You have to look at whether the rental unit is even a suitable place to rent to someone with pets, Wiler said. This keeps everyone happy.

The more you use cat-exclusive furniture like cat perches, cat trees and hiding spaces, and create a cat-friendly interior environment, the more your cats will interact with their own furniture and the less they will impact the rented environment, Johnson-Bennett said.

In other words, happy cats make happy renters and delighted landlords.

On Moving Day

Moving is an especially dangerous time for frightened pets that can be accidentally lost. This is a time to use common sense to keep your cat safe. While packing goes on in other rooms, set up a safe zone in a room where your cats can be confined so they are not exposed to the chaos of the move. If the door to this room can't be secured against accidental opening, put the cat in a well-protected crate. You may even want to consider boarding the cat while the house is being packed.

When you reach your new home, consider it an opportunity to set everything up so that your cat can adjust with a minimum of difficulties. Unlike we humans who thrive on variety, cats are creatures of habit and take great comfort from familiarity, Johnson-Bennett said. In the new home, nothing is familiar. The big mistake is to put your cat right into the center of chaos.

Set up one room as a cat sanctuary. Place familiar furniture in the room, even if it is not a permanent location. The more familiar, the better. This is not a time to throw out the old litterbox and scratching post, Johnson-Bennett said. Set up the sanctuary room with the things your cat is used to using. You might consider spraying the room with Feliway or using a Feliway diffuser, which hormonally calms cats.

Let your cat decide when to come out of its sanctuary and explore the rest of the house. Gauge how your cat is reacting, Johnson-Bennett said. If it is curious and happy, you can let it into more of the home, a little at a time. If it is still hiding, leave it in the sanctuary longer. Patience is especially important. The most important thing is to recognize that your cat is an individual and let your cat set the pace.

Once your cat starts to come out and interact with the new home, bring it into a cat-friendly space with cat perches, cat trees and hiding places. Your cat will feel happier and more secure in its new home.