

Give Pets Responsibly, Experts Say

American Humane suggests leaving cats and dogs off the holiday list.

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The hectic holiday season may not be an ideal time to give a cat or kitten as a gift, experts say. Those who are considering giving pets as gifts this holiday season might want to think twice, experts say. Selecting a pet requires work, and while some experts urge proper planning, others suggest that a puppy or kitten is never a good surprise to find under the Christmas tree.

According to counselors at Petland stores, giving a pet as a holiday gift is a unique and good idea, but it requires careful thought and research. Dan Star, operator of Petland of Hoffman Estates, Ill., said that Christmas Day is not the best day to introduce a pet into a home.

"Young pets are like babies," he said. "They need some time and extra attention just to adjust to a family routine."

Because Christmas may involve many visitors or activities away from home, this leaves little time to spend caring for a new pet, he said. Therefore, Star recommends introducing a new pet into the household days before or after the holiday.

According to the American Humane Association, pets as gifts can often lead to a lonely pet facing an uncertain future at the local animal shelter. For that reason, the organization dedicated to protecting animals and humans does not support giving a pet as a surprise gift, said Marie Belew Wheatley, president and CEO.

"The holidays are stressful for everyone, including animals," she said. "By surprising people with a pet, you are assuming they have the financial, emotional and time resources necessary to care for an animal, as well as the desire to care for a living being for the long term."

Before choosing the ideal pet for a friend or family member, American Humane offers the following advice: Picking a pet is personal. The choice should not be made by anyone other than those who will care for the pet. Pets, especially young pets, require time, energy and money. It can be overwhelming, especially when it is a surprise. Before buying or adopting a dog or cat, take time to look into different breeds, how to give an animal a safe home and the time commitment of owning a pet. Because many dogs and cats can live up to 15 years, the pet becomes part of the family. It's important to ensure that everyone in the house is willing to provide a healthy environment for the pet. The holidays aren't a vacation for new pets. Children can confuse proper treatment of an animal with the excitement of new toys around the holiday. Pets need a place where they can feel comfortable and start to acclimate to their new home. A less-hectic time of year is probably a wiser choice to bring a pet in into the home.