

choosing a cat sitter or kennel

basic feline care

Sometimes the most stressful part of going on vacation is not the choice of where to stay, but rather the choice of what to do with your pets. The dramatic increase in pet sitters and boarding kennels in recent years now makes this decision a little easier.

Kennel or pet sitter?

Whether you use a pet sitting service or board your cat is up to you. You know best how your individual pet is likely to react to a stranger entering the house or to being kept in a new location without you. Take some time to think about your absence from your pet's point of view.

Know your cat and how it will adapt to long hours alone. Some cats get bored and create mischief like knocking over plants or tearing out window screens. If you are going to be gone for more than a week, your cat may be safer in a kennel, where it is not going to escape and get lost.

On the other hand, your cat may get very stressed in a kennel, which can weaken their immune system. Cats are more likely to catch illnesses when their immune systems are compromised. It is sometimes easier on them to stay in your home the entire time you are away.

Pet sitters:

Pet sitters come to your home once or twice a day to care for your animals. If you have more than one pet, a pet sitter is often much less expensive than paying individual boarding fees for each dog and cat. If you also have birds, fish and other pets, it is more convenient to have them cared for in your home.



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

A child from the neighborhood may charge less, but a professional pet sitter is usually a mature adult capable of taking responsibility for your home and animals. If you consider hiring a child or teenager, be sure their parents are aware and involved also.

Pet sitters keep an eye on your house while you are gone. They usually offer additional services at no charge, such as bringing in mail, turning on lights, taking out trash, and picking up the paper. This activity makes your house appear occupied and lowers the risk of a break-in.

A professional pet sitter should be licensed, bonded and insured. This means they have a business license, a security bond or insurance policy to cover accidents (like broken vases) and a liability policy.

If your pet sitter is a total stranger, it may be a bit unnerving to give them access to your home. Ask for references and meet them before making a decision. Consider a trial pet sitting visit first to see if you and your pet are comfortable. You can always lock up valuables or lock doors to certain rooms.

Evaluating the pet sitter:

How long have they been in this business?

Are they licensed, bonded and insured? With what companies?

Can they provide references from other cat pet parents? Call these people and see what they say.

Do they ever hire others to cover their appointments? Ask to meet anyone else who will be coming into your home.

Do they have varied experience with cats? Do they have your own cats? Watch how they interact with your cat. If your cat is extremely shy, how do they plan to deal with that?

How long will the sitter stay for each visit? Do they play or sit with the cat?

What experience do they have with emergencies? How have they handled mishaps? What is their plan of action? What will they do if your cat gets out or disappears?

The contract:

You should be asked to sign a contract and a form giving the sitter permission to seek medical care for your cat if necessary. Be certain to provide the name and phone number of your preferred veterinarian. Include a list of any medications your pet may be on, and how and when to give them. It is not a good idea to allow your cat to go outside without direct supervision at anytime, but can be especially dangerous when using a cat sitter. Cats can get lost outside as the pet sitter is not a familiar person to the cat. If your cat is allowed outside, be sure to give your pet sitter specific instructions about when the cat can be let out. If they are an indoor-only cat, it helps to leave a note taped to all doors. If your cat likes to dash out, warn the pet sitter.

Boarding your cat:

All kennels should require current vaccine information, both for your pet's safety and that of the other cats. Rabies, leukemia and distemper are the critical ones.

Conditions vary at different boarding kennels. Visit the kennel and ask to see the cat area.

Evaluating the kennel:

Is the cat area near the dogs? Cats may stress at the barking and movement from the dog area.

Is it clean? Look in the occupied kennels. Are the litter boxes clean? Is there a heavy smell of cat urine? Are the kennels and accessories clean and dirt-free or is there hair everywhere?

How big are the kennels? Is there enough room for the cat to get away from the litter box? Some boarding facilities offer large kennels with a shelf for the cat to perch on. Others may offer daily playtime for an extra charge.

Do the cats there look content and healthy, or stressed?

Is there privacy between kennels? Some cats

will stress if they don't have an area they can get into where they are hidden from other cats.

Can you bring a bed or something with a familiar scent on it, such as a t-shirt?

Are the kennel hours convenient? You may be stuck paying for an extra night if the kennel is closed on Sunday, for example. Are you charged for a full day if you pick up your cat in the morning?

Does the kennel offer special services, such as baths or other grooming?

Can they medicate your cat if needed? If your cat needs daily medication or shots, consider boarding at your veterinarian's office. Boarding facilities may charge extra or not be equipped to handle medical care.

Can the kennel feed your cat the same food that is served at home? Will they prepare special meals? Give treats if you provide them? It's generally best to keep your cat on their regular diet, even if that requires providing the food and paying extra for the feeding service.

Are any special arrangements available for long-term stays? Are there extra charges for these services?

What form of payment do they accept? Is any of it expected up front?

Before you leave:

Be sure to leave emergency phone numbers with whoever is taking care of your cat. Call occasionally to see how your cat is doing. You'll rest easier knowing that your cat is in good hands while you're gone.