

What Makes A "Good" Pet?

Many of you will either call and ask a series of questions that goes something like this... *"I want to buy an exotic pet... Can you tell me which one makes a good pet? What do you recommend?"* These are very tough questions for me to answer based on a very limited amount of information. What does make a "good pet"?

Before you even get started with defining "good pet", if you are truly interested in owning an exotic animal, the first question that needs to be answered is what laws and regulations govern what animals in your particular state and **county**. You need to be very thorough in this investigation and cover state, **county**, municipal, and **local zoning** regulations. If you were to violate any of these regulations, you could possibly get your animal taken away from you. Do not take your friend's word for this, **do the work yourself**. What may or may not have been in effect when your friend purchased his pet could be changed now. Here is a link to some state laws and regulations and municipal codes to help you in your research.

Now that you have found out what you can and cannot possess, just exactly what is your definition of a "good pet"? That is an extremely subjective and personal answer. Take a look at all the various pets available out there. Birds, reptiles and snakes, dogs, cats, hedgehogs, sugar gliders, exotics, fish and more. There are enthusiasts happily supporting any and all of these animals as their version of a "good pet".

My biggest philosophy is ***"What you put into an exotic is what you get out"***. Establish how much **time** you will have for your new addition. The more time you have the better, more **bonded** your pet will be. Do you have enough time to make a cuddly pet? Even though there are subtle and not so subtle differences in all the animals I raise, the **quality** pet you will have is going to be almost entirely up to **you**, as long as you purchase from a quality breeder.

Take the coatimundi for example. Depending on how a person raises them, I've heard anything from "...it uses the litter box religiously and sleeps with me" to "I have to put a motorcycle helmet on to enter the cage". So the better question you would want to ask yourself may be "what kind of *personality traits* do I want in my exotic pet; *Playful? Energetic? Laid back? Cuddly? Smart? Inquisitive? Shy? Outgoing?* etc.

What other **characteristics** are important to you? How about size? Do you want a 50-pound animal like a caracal or Bennett's wallaby? Or possibly something smaller like the three-pound fennec fox or the 5-10 pound genet?

Are **bathroom habits** important to you? If you cannot tolerate poop in inappropriate places, then you really need to stop your researching now because most exotics are never 100% litter trained. Some like the genet and small cats (servals, caracals, lynxes) can be pretty close. Wallabies can be around 85% accurate. Fennec Foxes are possible but doubtful, as are coatimundis and kinkajous. Be prepared to spend a great deal of time in litter training for success.

Are you planning on keeping your pet primarily **indoors** or **outside**? Can your home survive a coati, caracal, or fennec fox? If you are considering an exotic cat as a house pet, for example, you need to know that this beautiful kitty will possess all the strength and agility of it's cousins in Africa and will be able to jump 4 feet straight up at six months of age. I personally recommend having some sort of "**proofed**" area for whatever you purchase, whether it be inside or outside, a room or a cage. Also along with this line of consideration is how much **space** does this animal require and how much space do you have available for it?

Another consideration is **cost**. How much **money** you are wishing to invest? Most exotics initial dollar outlay is in the \$1000-\$4000 range. This can include as little as the new baby, freight, and the initial supplies you will need to raise it in its infancy only, and does not take into consideration additional veterinarian costs.

Do you have a reliable **veterinarian** and **food source** nearby? A lot of vets are unwilling to see any exotic. It's a smart move to find this out BEFORE you need a vet's help. Some exotics, like wallabies, for example, eat a specialized diet that might require your local pet store or feed store to special order in. If you have to order your food from an out of state source, it could get to be very expensive.

Do you have **children**? Some exotics can pose a very real **danger** to children. If you do have children, how old are they? Are they capable of being taught how to handle an exotic? Are you ok with the possibility of bites and scratches? These questions are not intended to scare you. But most animals will scratch, and if they are being treated roughly as some small children can be, they could bite. Small cats have been known to stalk toddlers. Being aware of what your child could do to your pet and what your pet could do to your child will prevent possible heartache later.

Do you have **other pets**? The successful integration of most exotic pets depends on two things. First is the **disposition** of your current pets. Since they are most likely adults and your new exotic most likely a baby, the harder transition will be for your current pet. Second is **size** and whether or not your pets would be considered food to the exotic in its native habitat or vice versa. If the exotic you are considering is a carnivore, and your current pet is something like a bird or hamster, then there is a good chance that the exotic will try to make a nice lunch out of your current pet if given the right circumstances.

Take the time and do your research, and then enjoy the wonder, beauty, and love of your "great" exotic pet!!

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