

# Pets are great

*But maybe you should wait*

A puppy or kitten with a bright bow under the tree might make a lovely photograph, but one organization suggests that Christmas may not be the best time to bring home an animal.

Pet-a-Care suggests that the coming and going of the family is not the best situation to bring an animal into and often forms a bad foundation which leads to behavioral problems later. The organization also suggests being sure that the animal is wanted in the home and that the family can afford the vaccines and feeding of the animal. Pet allergies should also be considered.

THE PET Information Bureau suggests that a gift certificate from a pet shop might be the best compromise. Once holiday activity has subsided, gift-getter and giver can plan a leisurely trip to a pet shop or animal shelter and choose the new companion together.

The bureau also has a few suggestions for making pet selection easier:

- Birds will provide springtime cheer all year. Small birds such as parakeets or singing canaries are easy to keep and cost only about \$20 per year for feed. Initial outlay for a bird includes a cage, ranging from \$20-\$40; bird cage liners; toys; and seed and water dishes.

- Tree crabs are a gift idea for plant lovers who might enjoy having an assortment of these little creatures who are happy left hanging to the stems of certain houseplants. They are easy to handle and won't harm plants, spending their days slowly inching up and down the base of the plant.

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TREE CRABS live in shells, so it's a good idea to leave an assortment of various-sized shells in the plant dirt, so the crabs can shift shells as they grow. Tree crabs range in price from \$3-\$15 depending on their size and design of the shell.

- Fish-keeping is a popular hobby. Most pet shops stock a variety of complete aquarium setups, including tank, gravel, pump, filter and heater starting at \$25. By being provided with equipment, the recipient then can select the fish that appeal to him or her the most.

## Take precautions when using outdoor lighting

To light the outdoors safely for the holidays, use only cords, plugs, sockets and light bulbs that are designed for outdoor use.

Lights labeled for indoor use are not weatherproof, says Dick Plister, extension safety engineer at Michigan State University. They are not designed to tolerate the extremes of temperature and exposure to moisture that outdoor lights may be subject to.

Before using them, check strings of outdoor lights for cracked insulation, exposed wires or loose sockets. Discard defective strings before they can cause problems.

If you're placing strings of lights around windows or doorways, use insulated staples to hold them in position. Tap staples in lightly to avoid compressing insulation.

The best source of power for your outdoor lights is a weatherproofed outdoor outlet. If you must use an indoor outlet, avoid closing windows or doors directly on electrical cords. Drill a hole through a board, run the cord through the hole and close a window snugly on the board. Weather-strip all sides of the board to minimize heat loss around it.



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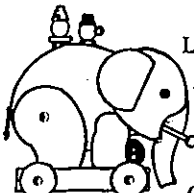


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