

When is giving a pet appropriate?

by Allison Ashton

What could be cuter than a new puppy under the tree? Or maybe a kitten, bird, hamster or even iguana.

But before you buy a loved one a new pal, consider whether it's appropriate, then decide which animal would fit the recipient's lifestyle.

How much space does the recipient have? Puppies may be small, but they can grow into big dogs. Be sure there will be enough yard space to accommodate the animal. Cats, hamsters, gerbils and small birds are good choices to consider for apartment dwellers or those who don't have outdoor space for dogs.

Does the recipient spend enough time at home? Contrary to popular belief, there are no no-maintenance pets. If the recipient spends a lot of time away from home, a pet probably isn't a good gift idea.

Does the recipient have any

allergies? A longhaired cat or dog that sheds a lot could pose problems.

Do young children live in the household? Some breeds of dog adapt better to young children than others.

Cocker spaniels, Labrador retrievers, German shepherds and golden retrievers all do well in a family setting, and they respond well to training. Some breeds of cat also do better than others in a family setting.

Does the recipient have previous experience with pets? Look for calm, relatively low-maintenance animals for novice pet owners. And give them the name of a good veterinarian.

Are there already pets in the household? Existing four-legged residents may or may not consider a new pet the ideal gift.

Finally, if it's not a pet intended to be bred, offer to pay to have the animal spayed or neutered when it's time.

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