

Pets: The perfect holiday presents?

LIVING, LOVING Christmas gifts can be some of the most precious available. Experts agree that, whether for companionship, fun or therapy, pets fill a need for humans — the need to love and care for another living thing.

But it's important that the purchase of a pet be a carefully planned decision, according to the Pet Information Bureau. Pets require a lot of effort and a Christmas pet presents unique problems.

Following are some considerations and recommendations from the bureau.

DON'T GIVE the pet on Christmas Day. Christmas is a time of great excitement and activity. Presents are being opened, people are talking, eating and playing and the pet may not get enough attention and care to prevent it being overwhelmed by all the commotion.

The best way to give a pet is to present a certificate on Christmas morning that promises the person a day of shopping for his new pet.

Match the pet to your lifestyle and personality. Whether you're willing to walk a dog daily is one of the factors you should evaluate before you buy a pet. It's not fair to an animal if he's not taken care of properly.

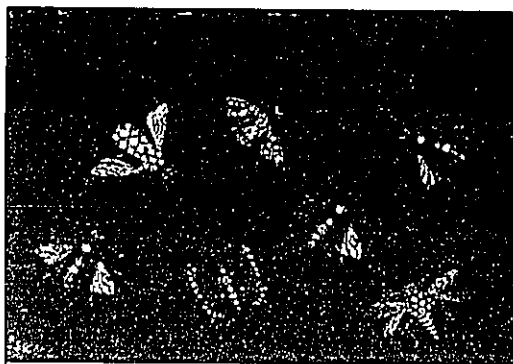
So evaluate an animal's specific needs before purchase. If you can't handle feeding a boa a live mouse, don't bring the snake into your home.

SOME ANIMALS require less care than others. A bird or hamster, for example, is relatively undemanding compared to a long-haired dog that needs frequent grooming, or a tropical fish tank that requires continual maintenance.

Determine responsibility for pet care. If you plan to buy a pet for a 3-year-old, be prepared to look after it yourself. If a child is older and begs for a pet, he should understand that he must act responsibly. But, be prepared to do all the chores that the

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