

VPM 1,600,000
June 4, 2009

Keep landlord, roommate happy with pet

YOUR HOME | Be considerate of others when a four-

Apartment owners are animal lovers these days.

Apartments.com reported more landlords have loosened their pet policies over the past 18 months. The online apartment listing firm says landlords are responding to the spike in demand from renters searching for pet-friendly digs.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some renters are homeowners displaced by foreclosures who have taken their pets with them. Job losses and pay cuts also have forced more renters to double up and roommates to share space with a four-legged roommate.

"This can pose additional challenges for pet owners who are renting," said Peggy Abkemeier, Rent.com's general manager.

Renters should read pet policies closely and be ready to pony up more money for Fido or Whiskers. And if roommates are in the picture, renters should be ready to smooth over any pet introductions.

Here are some tips to keep everyone happy with your pet.

For your landlord

Get permission: If you already have a lease in place, but want to add a furry companion, pass it by your landlord first. Some properties have strict "no pets allowed" policies.

If you sneak one in, you run the risk of the landlord finding out and having to choose between getting rid of your pet or breaking your lease, which could be costly. Even if the property accepts pets, the property will likely require a deposit for your animal friend. And your landlord will appreciate the heads up.

Do a targeted search: If you're looking for a new place with your pet, narrow your search using online apartment search sites. Typically, you can check off which kind of place you're looking for on the search form: cat-friendly only, cats and small dogs only, or all pets allowed. Read descriptions carefully, however, for any caveats.

For example, some places don't permit pit bulls, Rottweilers or Dobermans.

Read the fine print: Make sure to read your lease and understand the pet policy. Some pet deposits will cover damages while others won't. Also, some leases will list your pet as a "tenant" on the lease with a clause preventing you from getting another pet. Include pre-existing damage to your apartment in your lease, so you and your pet aren't blamed for it when you vacate, Abkemeier suggests.

Open your wallet: Apartment.com estimates that more than half of renters pay more than \$500 for a pet deposit. But that widely varies by area, apartment and type of pet. Renter and dog owner Jasmine Huffman in Chicago put down only \$75 for her 26-pound dog Sammy, while Olsen's properties in Denver require a nonrefundable \$300 deposit.

Be a good neighbor: Dogs can talk to each other through the walls. That's good and bad.

So if you can't muzzle your dog while you're at work, try obedience school to tame its barking, Abkemeier recommends. But remember that pet-friendly apartments are typically louder anyway.

Also, don't let cats or dogs wander the hallways or other public areas unleashed. Most apartments have rules against that. It's disrespectful to your neighbors and could be dangerous to your pet.

Last, pick up after your dog.

For your roommate

Full disclosure: If you're looking for a roommate, make sure to mention your furry friend in the posting. Some people are allergic to pets or don't like them at all. And be honest, too.

Does your dog play hide-and-seek with shoes or does your cat never relinquish the right side of the couch? This may be cute to you, but annoying to someone else.

Meet and greet: Before your potential roommate moves in, introduce animal to human. Some people might not realize they are allergic to certain types of animals.

1+1: Does your roommate have a pet too? Don't expect the two to hit it off right away. Introducing one pet to another takes time, patience and maybe a little bribery with pet treats. Some pets prefer to be loners. Make sure you have a contingency plan in place if that happens.

Be responsible: Don't expect your roommate to feed, clean or look after your pet. Also, if your dog or cat makes a mess, clean it up immediately. And vacuum, dust and sweep regularly. No one likes pet hair.