

# Pet Perfect

Author and pet expert Hanne Grice asks potential owners to think carefully before taking on a pet...

**BRITAIN** has long been known as a nation of animal lovers with over 47 per cent of the population owning a pet. The UK's favourite four-legged friends are cats and dogs with an around 8 million of each in the country.<sup>1</sup> Smaller animals like rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters are climbing up the popularity stakes with approximately 3 million in UK homes. For many, coming home to a furry friend each day makes their house a home. However, with pet ownership comes responsibility and financial investment. Statistics released by the RSPCA show pets are the latest victim of our troubled economic times with a 57 per cent increase in the number of abandoned animals.<sup>2</sup>

If you are considering getting a pet, here are some factors you may want to consider to help you decide whether to go for a goldfish or a golden retriever!

Are you allowed to have a pet where you live? Many rental agreements have restrictions on pets occupying the home, so check your documentation.

Is your home large enough for a pet and will it need a garden? Apartment living dogs is fairly common place in cities like New York and Tokyo where space is limited and property prices are high, however it does bring challenges. Dog owners living in properties with no outdoor space should be prepared to make frequent trips outside to provide their pet with space to play, exercise and toilet. Toilet training puppies can be especially challenging when your pet has limited immediate access outdoors. For cats, being restricted to living indoors may lead to potential weight gain, boredom or frustration contributing to problem behaviours such as spraying or symptoms similar to lethargy and depression.

Does your lifestyle allow you time to train, walk, groom and care for a pet? Some species require more attention than others; cats are far more independent than dogs, so think about the amount of time you are able to invest in providing the necessary care, training and stimulation your pet needs.

Can you afford to keep a pet? Every day

costs of food, bedding, toys, pet insurance and annual injections can all add up. Dogs typically live between 8 and 12 years with an average cost of £22,000 over the course of its lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

Are you or your family allergic to animals? Recent years has seen an increase in the popularity of certain breeds marketed as 'hypoallergenic dogs' such as the Labradoodle. However, all dogs shed hair and people's allergies vary, so always visit the pet first before you commit.

Whether you decide to get a rabbit or a dog, it is vital your furry friend gets a well balanced diet and an environment rich in mental and physical stimulation to ensure a well rounded and contented pet and therefore a happy owner!

Hanne Grice is a dog expert, author and founder of the award winning pet care and behaviour company Walk the Dog. Her new book "Playing With Your Dog" is out now.

1. Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) pet statistics 2009. PFMA provide statistics on the UK pet population and pet food market. 2. Sky News report "Opportunity Bites Hard On Abandoned Animals" April 27, 2009. 3. Churchill Insurance reports "Cost of A Dog" March 2, 2006.