

# Celebrating Our Furry, Finned and Winged Best Friends

Today we're honoring the animal companions that fill our lives with unconditional love, friendship and connection. On this National Pet Day, we recognize pets everywhere - whether they are already part of your household or waiting in a shelter or rescue for you to bring them home.

**Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- It's April 11th, which means it's National Pet Day 2024
- The purpose of National Pet Day is to not only honor the furry, fuzzy, finned, winged and other pets we cherish, but also those waiting in shelters for new homes
- Our animal family members offer us gifts every day of the year, such as connectedness, unconditional love and friendship, stress relief, and forgiveness
- If you're thinking about adding a pet to your family, there are many commonsense reasons to adopt from a shelter or rescue; when you know you saved your furry friend from an unpleasant fate, it makes the bond you share that much more meaningful

It's April 11th, which means it's National Pet Day — a day to recognize and appreciate animal companions worldwide. Of course, most pet parents celebrate their furry (or feathered, or finned) family members much more often, but back in 2006, animal welfare advocate Colleen Paige decided to mark a specific day each year to celebrate the joy our animal companions bring us.

Not only is today a good day to offer pets some extra time, attention, and TLC, but Paige also envisioned it as a day to raise awareness about the needs of pets of all kinds waiting in shelters, hoping to find new forever homes.

National Pet Day originated in the U.S. and has expanded internationally over the years. Pet lovers all over the world, including in the U.K., Ireland, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Spain, Guam, Scotland, and many more nations, recognize this special day.<sup>1</sup>

## 8 Gifts Our Pets Offer Us Today and Every Day

1. **The gift of connection** — Our pets stay connected to us no matter how awful we feel or behave. They're right beside us every step of the way, every minute of the day. During those times when we feel ignored or disengaged from the world, our pets offer consistent connectedness.
2. **The gift of communication** — Close, connected relationships are characterized by clear, consistent communication. When communication is untrustworthy or used in harmful ways, the relationship breaks down. Our pets speak to us constantly through their body language and behavior. It's our job to learn their language and communicate clearly to them what we expect and appreciate about their behavior.

3. **The gift of friendship** — It's no surprise the title "Man's best friend" is bestowed upon our canine companions. Our dogs (and cats, and hamsters, and birds, and turtles, etc.) are great company. They help us feel less lonely, disconnected, and isolated. We learn to communicate in ways our animal friends understand, and in return, they are happy to be a sounding board when we're confused or upset or just need a pal to talk to.
4. **The gift of forgiveness** — Most of us can remember a time when we ignored our pet, or lost patience and spoke too sharply. We also remember that our animal companion forgave us the very next second. Our animal friends don't hold grudges. They don't punish themselves or us by clinging to past insults. They offer instant forgiveness and an open heart.
5. **The gift of unconditional love** — Our animals offer us the very definition of unconditional love. They accept us just as we are, every minute of each day. They love us when we're away, and when we come home. They love us when we're mean, mad, sad, or impatient. They love us when we're attentive, and when we ignore them.

A pet's love is consistent and eternal and serves as an ever-present reminder that we are needed, valued, and worthy.

6. **The gift of better health** — Our pets can positively influence our health. Studies show pet ownership can help lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, improve cardiovascular health, relieve the depression associated with serious illness, and improve survival rates after a heart attack. Pets also give us something to live for and focus on beyond ourselves. It feels good to be needed and being needed motivates us to stay well.

Studies also show that interacting with pets can be more beneficial than interacting with friends. Human friends can be judgmental, but your nonhuman buddy accepts you exactly as you are in every moment of your life together.

Part of the reason we connect so deeply with animals may be their emotional depth. Many animals mourn, cry, and demonstrate other emotions. If you share your life with a pet, you know the love he or she feels for you is intense and enduring.

7. **The gift of stress relief** — Many of us live very busy, stressful lives, and while there are lots of good ways to reduce stress, coming home to a pet is certainly one of the best. Playing with your furry or feathered companion is a great way to relax and recharge. Just the simple act of petting another living creature can reduce cortisol levels and trigger a release of endorphins.
8. **The gift of living in the now** — Humans tend to spend a lot of time feeling regret for something in their past or feeling anxious about the future. It's not time well spent, but most of us tend to live in the past or the future rather than the present moment. Our pets, by their example, help us to stay present — to live for today.

Our animal companions experience each moment as it arrives with enthusiasm and joy, and so can we if we follow their lead.

While we can never repay our pets for all the precious gifts they bring to our lives, we can remind ourselves every day that they are at their best when we provide them with consistency in the form of healthy nourishment, daily exercise, structure to their daily routine, and lots of love. These are the "simple things in life" that form the foundation for a balanced, less stressful, more joyful existence.

## 12 Reasons to Adopt Your Next Pet From a Shelter

If you're thinking about adding a pet to the family, I hope you'll visit local shelters and rescues in your area. And keep in mind that in today's world, many rescues can arrange transportation services, so if you don't find what you're looking for locally, you can expand your search to other areas of the country.

To help in your planning and decision-making, the following are a dozen great reasons to adopt a shelter, foster or homeless pet.

1. There are plenty of animals to choose from at most rescues and shelters. They come in every age, shape, size, coat color, and breed mix, and you can find purebreds at shelters as well. In fact, many breeds have their own rescue organizations, so if you're looking for a purebred, make sure to check both your local shelter and breed rescue organization.
2. Compared to the cost of purchasing a pet, adopting one from an animal shelter is relatively inexpensive. And if you get a slightly older dog or cat, there's a good chance he's already fully immunized and sterilized.
3. Adopting a mature dog or cat also takes the guesswork out of determining what your pet will look like as an adult — what size she'll grow to, the thickness and color of her coat and her basic temperament, for example.
4. Adopting an older pet allows you to skip over the time consuming, often frustrating puppy or kitten stages of development.
5. Depending on his background, your older pet may already be housetrained or litterbox trained and know basic obedience commands like come, sit, stay, and down.
6. Many shelters and rescues provide lots of new owner support in the form of materials about training, common behavior problems, nutrition, basic grooming, and general care. In some cases, there are even free hotlines you can call for questions on behavior, training, and other concerns.
7. Many shelters and most rescue organizations also do assessments on every new pet taken in, to determine things like temperament, whether the pet has any aversion to other pets or people, whether he's housetrained, has had obedience training, etc.

Many of these organizations also have resources to help pets with lack of training or behavioral issues. So, when you adopt a pet from one of these organizations, you have a pretty good idea what to expect from your new dog or cat when you bring him home.

8. If you have kids, and especially if the new pet will belong to a child, adopting a shelter animal can open a young person's eyes to the plight of homeless pets. It can also help him learn compassion and responsibility, as well as how wonderful it feels to provide a forever home to a pet that might otherwise live life in a cage or be euthanized.
9. An older adoptive pet can be the perfect companion for an older person. Many middle-aged and senior dogs and cats require less physical exertion and attention than younger animals.
10. An adopted pet can enrich your life in ways both big and small. The unconditional love and loyalty of an animal companion can lift depression, ease loneliness, lower blood pressure, and give you a reason to get up in the morning. A kitty asleep in your lap feels warm and comforting. A dog that loves to walk or run outdoors can be just the incentive you need to start exercising regularly.
11. Every dog or cat not purchased from a pet store or backyard breeder improves the pet overpopulation problem created by irresponsibility and greed.

12. Adopting a dog or cat from a no-kill shelter can free up space for older or special needs pets that may not find new homes before the end of their natural lives.

There are countless benefits to being a pet parent, and when you know you saved your furry friend from an unpleasant fate, it makes the bond you share that much more meaningful.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [National Today, National Pet Day - April 11, 2024](#)

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