

A Guide for Tenants

Renting *with* Pets



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A recent American study revealed information that may surprise some people. It found that responsible pet owners actually make very good tenants; the kind that sign long term leases and take good care of their homes.





Further, the study found that there was little, if any, difference in the damage caused by pet or non-pet owning tenants¹.

With two out of every three Australian homes owning a pet, it's clear that we love our pets. So why are pet-friendly rentals so thin on the ground?

There is still a stigma that surrounds tenancy with pets, but you can give yourself the best chance to land your next rental by taking positive action and reading through this 'Renting with Pets' brochure.

It includes information on:

1. Finding a pet-friendly rental
2. Applying for and securing a pet-friendly rental
3. Responsible renting with pets

The steps are simple, easy to follow and based on common sense and tried and true methodology. It might be a longer journey than you might hope for, so be kind to yourself, keep a sense of humour and don't give up. Good luck!

¹ Carlisle-Frank P, Frank JM, Nielsen L 2005, 'Companion Animal Renters and Pet-Friendly Housing in the U.S.' *Anthrozoos*, 18 (1), 59-77.

STEP 1 Finding a pet-friendly rental

There's no denying it's a tougher market out there for pet owners. You can, however, help the process along by supplementing your regular rental search (real estate agents and newspapers) with a few key steps.

Search online: A number of the top ranking online real estate sites allow you to check a 'pets allowed' option in their search functions. The pickings are small but definitely growing in number as commercially astute real estate agencies recognise the benefits that landlords can receive by leasing their properties to responsible pet owners.

Use social media: Update your Facebook account with your rental requests, tweet it to your followers and keep an eye on content-generated classified sites. Ask your friends to re-tweet and share. You might unearth a little gem not yet released to the general public.

The word on the street: Even if you don't have a social media account, keep your friends and family in the loop. People, on the whole, like to help out and the more ears you have to the ground means that you could find a property much more quickly. And rightly or wrongly, landlords might also feel more comfortable in permitting pet owning tenants when they're friends, or friends of friends.



'I found my first house with my girlfriend and her two cats through my Aunty. I'd chatted to her at a family BBQ and was letting her know that we were looking for a place near my work. Coincidentally, her next door neighbour was looking to let her house out within the next month. My Aunty spoke with her the next day, got back to me with her phone number and we met up. I even took Banjo and Tully (the two cats) for her to meet in their cat box. We got along really well, and the cats were no problem and it saved her having to go through the whole expensive exercise of advertising for tenants.'

Chris, Essendon, ex-rental property tenant



STEP 2 Applying For and Securing a Pet-friendly Rental

A good negotiator is both confident and prepared. Luckily, we've got a few tips to help you be the best at both.

Confidence: Studies show that responsible pet owning applicants in general, make excellent long term tenants that abide by the tenancy legislation². Other research demonstrates that a well managed dog not only makes the owner feel safer, but helps to make the whole street more secure³.

Furthermore, recent Australian research supports the ownership of pets in strata, revealing that pets can contribute to a sense of community in strata developments by encouraging residents to interact. Dogs help their owners to get to know others within an apartment building by increasing the opportunities for social interaction and can be valuable in creating a strong apartment community. The research also indicated that pet owners were keen to help one another be responsible owners by giving each other advice looking after one another's pet⁴.

The key here is to come prepared and demonstrate that you are a 'responsible pet owner'.

Be prepared: Download, fill out and submit our Pet Application and Agreement forms to the landlord or managing agent with your rental application. These forms provide a process for the approval to keep pets to be documented. It's important for pet

2 'Companion Animal Renters and Pet-Friendly Housing in the U.S.' 2005, *Anthrozoos*, 18 (1), 59-77.

3 Wood L. 2009, 'Living Well Together', *Petcare Information and Advisory Service*, p21.

4 Power E 2013, 'Dogs and Practices of Community and Neighbouring' *Anthrozoos* Volume 26, Issue 4. 579-581.



owners to have this approval in writing. For more detailed information and to download the forms visit www.acac.org.au

Pet Application Form (Pet Resume): Helps you to present relevant and specific information relating to your pet/s. It not only makes it easier for you to apply to the landlord or managing agent, but also for the landlord or managing agent to have all the information they need to make a decision. Pet application forms can include a photograph and description of your pet as well as information such as breed, age, vaccination and microchip details. You can also attach training certificates and references from previous landlords, managing agents, neighbours and veterinarians along with referee contact details.

Pet Agreement Form: Helps to clearly detail how pets will be kept and managed once they are approved. This can include requirements to ensure the pet doesn't unreasonably disturb neighbours, as well as expectations for pet hygiene and maintenance.



STEP 2 Applying For and Securing a Pet-friendly Rental

Important information

Pets in strata: Gaining permission to keep pets in a rented strata property is a two stage process; in most instances you will need to gain consent not just from the landlord, but also from the owners corporation. Once you have the permission of the landlord, then you should make a second, full and clear application to the owners corporation. The owners corporation can override any approval from the landlord in accordance with its by-laws. So before entering into a tenancy agreement you should also enquire about the strata scheme's 'animals' by-law when asking the landlord whether pets are allowed. New resources have been developed in conjunction with Strata Community Australia to help support the responsible ownership of pets in strata housing. For more detailed information visit www.stratacommunity.org.au/strata-living/pets

Council regulations: It's also worth noting that some Councils have regulations around the number of pets that can be housed on each property. If you have multiple pets, make sure you check these *before* the move.

Apply widely: Unless a property specifically states that 'No Pets are Allowed', it's worth asking whether pets may be considered and submitting your application along with supporting documents such as the Pet Application and Pet Agreement forms. For any number of reasons, the landlord might look at your application and decide you and your pet are the perfect tenants.



Stand out from the crowd: Competition can be tough, so be opportunistic, try to make yourself stand out and get in early. Have all your information ready so that you can apply on the spot. You're more likely to be successful if you're well presented and engaging. You may also increase your chances by offering to pay a few months rent in advance if you're able to.

Best foot forward: Double check that your rental application is not missing any details and that all necessary paperwork such as proof of identity and income is attached. Managing agents and landlords may be reluctant to chase up missing information. You can help yourself by ensuring you're one of the few applicants that is totally organised, well prepared and puts their best foot forward throughout every stage of the process.

Be honest: Finally, remember that honesty is always the best policy. If you're not entirely honest about your pet owning status, you will be putting at great risk any rental tenancy you may have acquired and causing yourself unnecessary stress. An Australian study revealed that for 11% of pet-owning tenants (mainly cat owners) their landlords or body corporate were unaware that they kept pets⁵. In other new Australian research pet owners reported that keeping pets without permission was stressful and left them with a feeling of housing insecurity⁶.

5 Petcare Information and Advisory Service 2010, 'Pets in the City' Sydney, pp 17.

6 Power E 2013, 'Renting with Pets in Sydney, Australia: A Social and Animal Welfare Challenge' Research funded by Mars Petcare and University of Western Sydney Partnership Grant (unpublished data).



STEP 3 Responsible renting with pets

Congratulations! You've found your home, and you've (almost) recovered from the move.

As a savvy pet owner, you'll know that a responsible renter with pets can be a valuable asset. The research shows that you'll tend towards property loyalty, get along well with your neighbours and have longer lasting bonds in the community. Now it's time to get the best from the situation by following some simple, time honoured steps.

House Pride: Maintain a high standard of cleanliness and sanitation at all times, cleaning up and disposing of any animal waste as soon as possible. There are some very effective, easy to use products on the market specifically designed to clean up after your pet. If you'd prefer to go green, a mixture of common household items - warm water, baking soda and vinegar - can also do a fine job.

Love thy neighbour: Talk to any relationship advisor and they'll tell you that the biggest reason for relationship splits is due to communication breakdown. This can include the relations with your neighbours.



A couple of simple actions can help to ensure that your relationship with them (and your landlord) stays sunny-side up:

- Introduce yourself and your pet to your surrounding neighbours. Don't leave this too late in the piece; sometime in the first week of moving in is about right.
- Let them know that if they have any issues, you'll be happy to talk things through with them if the need arises.
- If you live in a strata community try to connect with other pet owners. Australian research shows that strata dwelling pet owners were keen to ensure their pets fitted in well with others in the community, and regularly helped one another be responsible owners by letting each other know about barking dogs, giving each other advice on training and caring for pets and looking after one another's pet⁷.



⁷ Power E 2013, 'Dogs and Practices of Community and Neighbouring' *Anthrozoos* Volume 26, Issue 4. 579-581.

STEP 3 Responsible renting with pets

One of the biggest issues that can upset neighbourly relations is a noisy pet – especially when the pet is noisy in your absence. A lot of people don't even realise that their pet is making noise while they're away and it's the neighbour that brings it to their attention.

If you've followed the actions above, then there's a better chance that your neighbour will speak to you first, rather than the local council or your landlord. If so, thank them for alerting you to the situation and let them know that you're working on a solution. As it may take some time to achieve the kind of behaviour you want from your pet, also let your neighbour know it could take a little while and encourage them to come back to you if the need arises.

Love thy pet: While the basics of care might apply across the board to all companion animals (enough food and water, a safe place to sleep, physical and mental exercise, socialising etc) each pet will have individual needs as well. You can understand your pet's specific needs by talking to your vet and by spending quality time with your pet, paying close attention to their behaviour in certain environments and while engaging in particular activities.



'When my family first moved in, I decided to take the time and introduce all of us (including Mollie the Staffordshire Terrier) to our immediate neighbours. Jenny and Graham live across the road and have a Fox Terrier who is Mollie's best mate, Verna is right next door and is a sweet old lady who's lived in the area for years, and behind us lives Tegan, her boyfriend and her mum. Between us all, we've come to help each other out in different ways. We don't have any other family in the area, so it's been great to have such good people close by to rely on.'

Jane, Armidale, NSW





Helpful tips

Listed below are just a few areas that have been identified as key areas of concern.

Home alone: Animal behaviour experts say that a pet that is home alone is just as likely to be snoozing the day away, rather than missing you. In fact it's estimated that dogs will spend up to 14 hours a day sleeping and cats even more. But keeping your pet's mind active and their body physically satisfied can be helpful in weeding out boredom and nuisance behaviour that might tend towards the destructive. Here are some tips to help you do this:

- Provide safe, interesting toys on a rotating basis to challenge your pet, or hide low fat, nutritious treats around the home for them to find.
- Pets with a disposition to gnaw might enjoy a rubber toy stuffed with treats or their usual dry food, that they have to work at to release. It's a great way to keep them occupied and distracted from the fact that you've left the house.
- Provide spaces to climb, a scratching post or a climbing tree for your cat to enjoy inside. Outside you could plant or pot a few cat-friendly plants like cat nip or cat grass to keep them satisfied.



- Make the most of the time you spend with your pet when you're around, allow them indoors and remember that regular exercise and play can entertain and expend a lot of otherwise pent-up energy!
- Leave the television or the radio on in the background when you're not around.
- Arrange for trusted neighbours, friends or family to drop by and give your pet some love and attention during the time that you're away. Perhaps they might also have a 'stay at home' pet. If the pets enjoy each other's company, work out a schedule so they can share the time together while you're out and about.
- Some pets feel anxious when left at home alone, occasionally this can be a more serious problem Animal Behaviourists call 'separation anxiety'. This profound fear of being alone can result in anxiety and behavioural problems. More severely affected animals usually require medication prescribed by a veterinarian, in addition to environmental enrichment and behaviour modification. In these cases, seek professional assistance.





Noise and barking: Barking can be a problem and is generally caused by boredom, separation anxiety, territorial behaviour, reactivity to noises and fear.

- One simple solution to barking behaviour is to keep your toilet-trained dog inside. While the noise may be insulated, dogs also feel more secure inside and are less likely to bark at passers-by or other dogs.
- Another good idea is to give your dog some regular, robust exercise – they can just relax and sleep it off while you're away.

General care: When people and pets share their lives together, the way owners approach the care of their pet can make a big difference to their general enjoyment of life.

- Form a trusted and ongoing relationship with your local vet. He or she will consult with you and your pet to develop a sustainable annual health plan that takes into consideration diet, exercise, and specific health requirements. Detail regular check-ups, vaccination dates, worming and flea treatment times in your calendar along with council run pet programmes and training sessions.
- Keep your pet secure on your property. Wandering or stray dogs and cats can annoy neighbours and are a risk to people, other animals and themselves. Always leash your dog when walking in public.



- When you move, register your pet with the local Council, update the microchip details and if necessary their identification tag. Some pets may be disoriented and feel unnerved by the move. Having your pet clearly identified means that if they do escape, their chances of being returned home, safe and sound, are much greater.

Training: Just like people, dogs especially need guidance and clear and consistent boundaries, so it's vital that dogs are trained and socialised from a young age.

- Training will encourage acceptable behaviour and result in happier dogs. Dogs that are untrained and unsocialised are often noisy, anxious and unpredictable. They are certainly harder to live with than well-trained, well-socialised companions.
- Socialisation from a young age is critical for all dogs. Socialising means introducing your puppy to a range of experiences in a positive and safe way. Many vets run their own puppy training classes and this can be a great way to get started with a new puppy. Call your local vet to find out whether there's something near you.
- Keep the training up as your dog grows older. Ongoing training reinforces trained behaviour and keeps the brain active.





'We'd had Kenny our Golden Retriever since he was a pup. We'd taken him to puppy school but to be honest, hadn't thought about going to anything after that. We just assumed that he wasn't the kind of dog we could really trust off lead or around small kids (because he was pretty excitable). It was one of our neighbours actually, that suggested we take him to the local positive dog training school. It was part Council run, and after just 6 weeks Kenny was a different dog! We can now get him to sit and stay, come on call and trust him pretty much around anyone.'

Taylor, Brisbane, QLD





There's no denying that renting with pets comes with many challenges. But it's important to remember that the facts state that responsible pet owners are just as good, if not better than any other kind of tenant. So know your rights, be honest, be prepared and stay determined. A life with pets comes with a full swag of benefits, social, mental and physical, so it's worth walking the extra mile.

Listed below are web and phone contacts for the Government Departments in each state to contact if you're experiencing conflict over pet related rental issues.

- **New South Wales – NSW Fair Trading**
www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au
13 32 20
- **Western Australia – Department of Commerce - Consumer Protection**
www.commerce.wa.gov.au
1300 304 054
- **Northern Territory – Consumer Affairs**
www.consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au
1800 019 319
- **Queensland – Residential Tenancies Authority**
www.rta.qld.gov.au
1300 366 311
- **Victoria – Consumer Affairs Victoria**
www.consumer.vic.gov.au
1300 558 181
- **South Australia – Government of South Australia - Tenancies Branch**
www.sa.gov.au
131 882
- **Tasmania – Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading**
www.consumer.tas.gov.au
1300 654 499



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Australian Companion Animal Council Incorporated is a non-profit organisation. It is the peak body representing pet ownership and the pet industry in Australia. For more information visit www.acac.org.au

ASAVA is a special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) for practicing veterinarians with a focus on small / companion animals. For more information visit www.ava.com.au/asava

Information for landlords and managing agents is available in the brochure 'Tenants with Pets - A Guide For Landlords and Managing Agents'.



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