

# Aged to Perfection

The perks of adopting an older animal

By Jane Warshaw

If you're thinking about getting a cat or dog, there's a lot to be said for adopting an adult animal.

First of all, you know just what you're getting. You know how big they're going to be, whether they're couch potatoes or want to run themselves—and you—ragged. You know whether they like other cats and dogs or whether they want to be the one and only.

Do you want a dog that'll tell you how great you are, or one who's loving but a bit less demonstrative? Do you want a cat that'll curl up on top of your head, or one who prefers bouncing off walls? With adult cats and dogs, you don't have to guess who they're going to grow into. Jane Hoffman, president of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's animals, says, "Kittens have no problem being adopted. But in six months they're going to be a cat. Adult cats have a harder time finding homes, so adopting an adult cat means you're also saving a life."

Adult cats are also already litter trained and past the age where they pounce on your feet with razor sharp kitten teeth and claws and tear around your house in the middle of the night chasing invisible things from Mars that they alone can see.

There are real advantages to adopting

an adult dog, too. For one thing, they're usually housebroken and past the age when they want to chew on your sofa, shoes, toes, furniture or fine leather goods. If they're not already housebroken, they're physically developed enough to hold it in for longer and are fast learners.

There's a common misconception that adult pets in shelters are just felines and canines with problems. Animals can be there through no fault of their own—owners may have died or moved away.

Adoptable pets have usually been evaluated by behavior experts who have worked with them to teach them basic obedience. Cheryl Ann Fernandez, the adoptions manager for Bide-A-Wee, says her group offers lifetime behavior counseling for new owners of cats and dogs to help strengthen the bond between owners and their pets.

"I think older pets are more appreciative of their new homes," said Dr. Linda E. Jacobson, D.V.M. and president of the Veterinary Medical Association of New York City. "Bonding will happen as long as love and kindness are present."

Adult animals don't need the serious commitment of energy and round the clock care that puppies and kittens do. "It's the difference between taking an infant into your home and taking in an



Several adult pets available for adoption: Charlotte, Winnie and Zelda are at The Humane Society, and Sammy is at the ASPCA.

adult," said Hoffman, of the Mayor's Alliance. "With an adult pet, you have a great companion immediately. And if you adopt a more mature cat or dog, you know you've done a wonderful thing to give them a safe and loving home for the rest of their life."

Animals adopted from organizations like Animal Care and Control, the Humane Society, the ASPCA, Bide-A-Wee, Animal Haven or any other member of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals have been medically cleared, spayed, neutered and vaccinated. They also come with a free follow up health or wellness examination. You can get a free senior pets newsletter with tips on adopting senior pets and pictures of available cats and dogs by emailing [seniorpetsnyc@aol.com](mailto:seniorpetsnyc@aol.com).

There are advantages to adopting mixed breed cats and dogs, too. Genetic diversity tends to make them healthier and their temperaments more moderate and flexible. They adjust more easily to different lifestyles and households. Morris the Cat was found in a shelter. So was Sandy from "Annie" and Benji, the

movie star dog. These one-of-a-kind pets usually live longer than pedigrees because they don't have the problems that come with inbreeding.

Great cats and dogs are at those shelters, waiting for a second chance. Anyone who adopts a pet from a shelter feels good about it, but there's something special about adopting an adult cat or dog.

Here are some good places to look:

- New York City Animal Care and Control, 326 East 110th Street, 212-722-4939
- The Humane Society, 306 East 59th Street, 212-752-4840
- The ASPCA, 424 East 92nd Street, 212-876-7700
- Bide-A-Wee, 410 East 38th Street, 212-532-0536
- Animal Haven, 251 Centre Street, 212-274-8511
- SeniorPetsNYC@aol.com and [mslon-donspets@aol.com](mailto:mslon-donspets@aol.com)
- Petco hosts in-store adoptions at their Union Square store every weekend for rescue groups like Kitty Kind and Earth Angel Dogs.

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