

Finding Pet-Friendly Housing

By Sherry Woodard

Anyone who rents knows how difficult it can be to find a decent place to live. Those of us who have pets face a special challenge. If you know you're going to be looking for a new home for you and your pets, allow plenty of time for your search.

What can I do to be more effective in my search?

You can start by gathering proof that you are a responsible person. A letter of recommendation from any or all of the following people can help a lot: your current landlord, your veterinarian, your trainer, your groomer, a neighbor or two, a pet sitter or dog walker. All of these people can contribute to the image of your dog or cat as a valued, well-behaved family member.



Next, start checking in your local newspaper and ask local realtors about pet-friendly housing. Do a search on the Internet for "pet friendly rentals." Here are several websites that might be helpful:

www.peoplewithpets.com

www.mynewplace.com

www.doghousproperties.com

If someone has a no-pets policy, don't try to sneak in your pets, hoping that your landlord won't notice or your pet will charm the landlord into changing his policy. Instead, bring your references and offer to pay an extra security deposit. Some landlords are impressed by this level of planning and commitment. You can also offer to bring your pet to meet the landlord. To show how well you take care of your pet, bring his or her medical record and, if you have a dog, his license.

What do I do after I've found a place?

Once you have secured a place, make sure that you have written permission to have a pet. A verbal agreement between you and the landlord is not enough. Some security deposits are non-refundable, so you should discuss deposits or any other pet fees in advance. Again, get all the details in writing. Ask the landlord if he or she has written house rules for pets. If so, make sure the rules are realistic for you and your pets. Ask for a copy of the rules.

Are there any other resources that might be helpful?

Best Friends for Life: Humane Housing for Animals and People is a booklet that covers the following:

- How disabled individuals may be eligible to keep pets even in “no-pets” housing
- A new federal law that allows pets in federally assisted housing
- Arguments that may allow animals in “no pet” privately owned housing
- Responsible pet guardianship
- How to convince your landlord to adopt a “pets welcome” policy
- Model rental guidelines that protect the rights of renters and animals

The booklet is available through Doris Day Animal League by calling (202) 452-1100, e-mailing info@ddal.org, or accessing www.ddal.org (click on News and Publications).

San Francisco SPCA’s Open Door Program provides helpful information for tenants seeking pets-allowed housing (including sample pet résumés) and a model program for landlords. Go to www.sfspca.org/programs-services/open-door.

The Humane Society of the United States has resources for both tenants and landlords. Go to www.hsus.org and search for “pet friendly rentals.”

The ASPCA has some additional resources at www.aspca.org (search for “pet friendly housing”).

Our pets depend on us to find a place where we can live comfortably and happily together. With an investment of some time and effort, you will find a great pet-friendly home.

Sherry Woodard is the animal behavior consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends’ No More Homeless Pets mission.