



Best Bets for Pets

Choosing Pets Wisely

Keeping exotic animals as pets can come with a hidden cost.

Parrots are the world's most endangered group of birds due to devastation from the international pet trade.

The enormous global demand for exotic pets is fueling the illegal capture and trade of millions of birds, mammals and reptiles annually, most of which die in the process of being caught or in transit.

Green iguanas can grow to over six feet long while Burmese pythons can reach 20 feet in length — six to eight times their size as babies.

Finding new homes for large, hard-to-handle animals can be difficult, if not impossible, particularly since most zoos are unable to accept them.

Hundreds of wild “pets” attack their owners every year.

Animals like **tigers, venomous snakes and monkeys don't make good pets.** They're unpredictable, can be aggressive and have been known to carry diseases that are transferable to humans. Private ownership is also illegal in many states.

The “Best Bets for Pets” wallet card is designed to help you make educated pet choices that are in the best interest of you and your pet. For more information on the wallet card animals, please visit the Philadelphia Zoo's website at www.philadelphiazoo.org.



PHILADELPHIA ZOO

3400 West Girard Avenue • Philadelphia, PA 19104-1196
philadelphiazoo.org

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Animals listed may have increasing legality issues, as you move from the green to red color categories on the Best Bets for Pets wallet card. Before making a purchase, visit your state's Division of Fish and Wildlife or Department of Agriculture website for state laws, and check your township's local ordinances on exotic pet ownership.

The Best Bets for Pets wallet card is not an all-inclusive animal list. If you are interested in an animal not mentioned here, please use the guidelines provided by this card to help research your potential pet.

Use This Card To Make Wise Pet Choices

Color categories reflect considerations including diet, housing, special equipment needs, veterinary concerns and conservation status for the animals listed.

Good Choice —
A good pet for most people.

Proceed with Caution —
Previous experience a plus; extra care is often required.

Highly Specialized —
Advanced hobbyists or professionals only; probably has special needs.

Always Avoid
Not suitable as pets.

Conserve Wildlife: Curb Your Pet Choices

Many pet trade species face conservation issues that are threatening their survival.

You can help stop the illegal pet trade by making sure any exotic pets you have are legal to own and captive-bred, or by not keeping wild animals as pets at all.

Visit philadelphiazoo.org for more information on making responsible pet choices.

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Good pet choices begin with you! The following considerations can help you find the right pet. Remember, pets should never be an impulse buy, and will be a part of your household for years to come!

Time

Some animals can be surprisingly time-consuming! Do your research and make sure that the time you need to spend with your future pet (*feeding, daily cleaning, interacting with and training*) matches your lifestyle.

Money

Consider the costs! Pets need vet care, special housing, beds or hide boxes, perches and toys to keep them happy and healthy. Food costs can add up quickly too, especially for animals requiring special diets.

Space

The more space is better! Use multiple sources to determine a housing size requirement. And remember, an animal's temperament also influences the amount of space it needs. It's a myth that an animal only grows to be as big as the size of the enclosure — this is not true for reptiles, amphibians, birds or mammals.

Personality

Make sure that your choice of a companion animal fits your personality. If you like peace and quiet, avoid birds — they're noisy. If you like a tidy house, steer clear of livestock and parrots — they're messy. Many animals, like ferrets and aquatic turtles, have strong odors. Cuddling does not go over well with many animals such as reptiles and amphibians. Your best bets for cuddlers are dogs, cats, guinea pigs, domestic mice, domestic rats and cockatoos (these birds need extra cuddle time).



Legal Issues

The best method to research the legality of owning a future pet is to contact a representative from your state or local legislative office. Did you know that owning ferrets is illegal in California, owning hedgehogs and sugar gliders is illegal in Pennsylvania, and owning certain reptiles is illegal in Delaware?

Conservation Concerns

Birds, reptiles and marine life are among the species most frequently taken from the wild to supply the illegal pet trade. Ensure that your future pet has been bred in captivity and not taken from the wild. Additionally, because many exotic pets are released by owners when they become too difficult to handle, these animals can have a devastating effect on local ecosystems. For example, unwanted pet Burmese pythons introduced into the Florida Everglades are now breeding in the wild, competing for food and displacing native wildlife.

Further Reading

Look for the *Best Bets for Pets* pages in the conservation section of the Philadelphia Zoo's website. There, you will find more information on each species listed on the *Best Bets for Pets* wallet card and links to other online resources.

Good Choices

Ball python
Canary
Cat (*domestic*)
Chicken
(*check zoning*)
Corn snake (*rat*)
Dog* (*domestic*)
Dove/Pigeon
(*domestic*)
Finch
Fire-bellied toad
Gecko (*fat-tailed*
or *leopard*)
Gerbil
Goldfish
Guinea pig
Guppy

**Some breeds are easier than others, do your research before choosing*

Proceed with Caution

African hedgehog†
Anole (*American chameleon*)
Bearded dragon
Beta (*Siamese fighting fish*)
Chinchilla
Cockatiel
Degu†
Dog* (*domestic*)
Ferret (*domestic*)
Fish (*tropical freshwater*)
Hamster (*Syrian*)
Horned frog
Kingsnake
Parakeet (*budgie*)

†Illegal in Pennsylvania.

Highly Specialized

African millipede
Boa constrictor
Chameleon
Farm animals (*goat, horse, pig, pony*)
Fish and coral
(*captively born saltwater*)
Fowl (*duck, turkey*)
Iguana (*green*)
Mantella frog
Monitor lizard
(*savannah*)
Parrots (*African grey, Amazon, cockatoo, eclectus, macaw, caiques, conure, lovebird, Senegal, etc.*)

Always Avoid

Alligator
Bats
Bear
Caiman
Crocodile
Diamondback terrapin
Eastern box turtle
Exotic cats
(*small and large*)
Hermit Crab
Kinkajou
Monitor lizard, large
Prairie dog
Primates
Native species
(*raccoons, skunks, squirrels, crows, ravens, other wild birds, snakes, frogs, toads, lizards, etc.*)
Fish and coral
(*wild caught*)
Tarantula (*Chilean rose hair*)
Tortoise (*Russian*)
Venomous snakes and lizards
Wild dogs (*coyote, fox, wolf and hybrids*)