

13 Steps to Finding Pet-Friendly Rental Housing



1. Give yourself enough time. Nobody likes the hassles involved with moving, much less finding rental housing that accepts pets. If you are renting now, start to check ads and contact real estate agents and rental agencies at least six weeks before your lease expires.

2. Understand why many housing communities reject pets. Put yourself in the shoes of a landlord, housing manager, property owner, or condominium association board member for a moment: They may have had bad experiences with irresponsible pet owners who didn't safely confine their animals or pick up their feces, sneaked pets in, or left ruined carpets and drapes when they moved out. They may be worried about complaints from neighbors about barking dogs and wonder how they are going to deal effectively with pet owners if problems arise. All these concerns are legitimate.

That's why people looking for an apartment, house, or condominium to rent must be able to sell themselves as responsible pet owners, who are committed to providing responsible pet care and being responsible neighbors.

3. Make use of available resources. Contact the humane society or animal care and control agency serving the area into which you are moving; the agency may be able to provide you with a list of apartment communities that allow pets. If you know any real estate agents, rental agents, or resident managers who own pets themselves or who share your love of animals, ask them for leads.

While there is no substitute for making a professional connection with someone who understands how important your pet is to you, look for a community apartment guidebook at the supermarket or near newspaper distribution boxes on the street. The guide may indicate which apartment communities allow pets and may list any restrictions, such as species allowed or weight limits. In addition, be sure to check local newspapers. Finally, take a look at our links to sites that list pet-friendly apartments across the country.

4. Recognize that it may be futile to try to sell yourself and your pet to a large rental community with a no-pets policy. You're more likely to be successful if you focus on places that allow most pets, allow certain pets (for example, cats or dogs weighing less than 20 pounds), or that don't say, "Sorry, no pets." Individual home and condominium owners may be easiest to persuade. Ideally, look for a community with appropriate pet-keeping guidelines that specify resident obligations. That's the kind of place that's ideal for pet owners because you'll know that other pet caregivers there also are committed to being responsible residents.

5. Gather proof that you're responsible. The more documentation you can provide attesting to your conscientiousness as a pet owner, the more convincing your appeal will be to your future landlord. Compile the following documents:

- A letter of reference from your current landlord or condominium association verifying that you are a responsible pet owner.
- Written proof that your adult dog has completed a training class, or that your puppy is enrolled in one.
- A letter from your veterinarian stating that you have been diligent in your pet's medical care. Supply documentation that your pet has been spayed or neutered and vaccinated against rabies. (Sterilized pets are healthier, calmer, and far less likely to be a nuisance to neighbors.) Most veterinarians routinely fulfill such requests for their clients.

6. Make your request to the individual or group with the ultimate authority to grant your request. Usually this will be the owner of the house or apartment. The owner may, however, delegate the decision to a property manager or resident manager. Check to see if, in addition to obtaining the landlord's approval, you must also submit a written request to the building's board of directors (or association, in the case of a condominium community).

7. If you encounter a no-pets policy, ask if it is the result of a negative experience with a previous resident. Addressing your landlord's prior experience may show you how to present your own request most effectively.

8. Let the landlord, manager, or condominium board know that you share any concerns about cleanliness. Point out that your pet is housetrained or litter-box trained. Emphasize that you always clean up after your dog outdoors and that you always properly dispose of your pet's waste.

9. Promote yourself. Responsible pet owners make excellent residents. Because they must search harder for a place to live, pet caregivers are more likely to stay put. Lower vacancy rates mean lower costs and fewer headaches for landlords and real estate agents. Let prospective landlords and managers know that you understand that living with a companion animal is a privilege, not a right.

10. Promote your pet. Offer to bring your pet to meet the owner or property manager, or invite the landlord to visit you and your pet in your current home. A freshly groomed, well-behaved pet will speak volumes. Emphasize that the same pride you take in caring for your pet extends to taking care of your home. Many landlords are concerned about fleas, so be sure to let your prospective landlord know that you maintain an active flea-control program for your pet and home. Provide written proof that your pet is spayed or neutered and is, therefore, healthier, calmer, and less likely to be a nuisance.

Make it clear to the landlord, manager, or condominium board that you keep your cat inside and your dog under control at all times and that you understand the health and safety benefits of doing so.

If you can't arrange for a meeting, consider making a short scrapbook with photos of your pampered pet in his or her current home, and/or draw up a résumé for your pet. Scrapbooks and résumés are unique ideas that are guaranteed to make a strong, yet positive, impression.

11. Be willing to pay a little extra. Tell your prospective landlord or resident manager that you are willing to pay an extra security deposit to cover any damages your pet might make to the property.

12. Get it in writing. Once you have been given permission by a landlord, manager, or condominium committee to have a pet, be sure to get it in writing. Sign a pet addendum to your rental agreement. Comprehensive agreements protect people, property, and the pets themselves. If your lease has a no-pets clause, verbal approval won't be enough. The no-pets clause should be removed from the lease (or crossed out and initialed) before you sign it. Be sure it has been removed from or crossed out on your landlord's copy, too.

You may be required to pay a pet deposit, some or all of which may be nonrefundable. Be sure to discuss deposits and monthly pet-related fees in advance. And have these fees put into writing, too. Request a copy of any house rules pertaining to pets. Let the landlord know that you will abide by the rules set for the broader community and respect the concerns of residents who do not own pets.

13. Be honest. Don't try to sneak your pet in. Keeping an animal in violation of a no-pets rule contributes to the general inclination of landlords not to allow pets. You also may be subject to possible eviction or other legal action.

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