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dimensions: 4.375" x 9.25"

Best bets for pets

How can you become a superior pet owner? Read on.



BY STEVE DALE

HERE ARE SOME tips to better care for your pet this year:

VOLUNTEER: There's no animal shelter in America that can't use help. Cat lovers also can help stray and feral outdoor cats by participating in Trap-Neuter-Return programs or creating one of their own. The cats — who typically form colonies — are trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated for rabies and released. Any friendly adult cats and kittens are adopted into homes. Caregivers watch over the colonies, often supplementing their food supply.

SPAY OR NEUTER: Most people don't have good reasons for failing to comply, saying things like, "I think it will be so cute to have puppies," or "I'll get around to it." But we should respect those who do have a sensible explanation or objection to spaying or neutering, such as a religious conflict ("I don't believe in birth control myself, so why for my pet?") or, "I will spay/neuter, but not until my dog is over a year old because that's what my vet suggested."

BE A BENEVOLENT MASTER: I'm not a fan of training dogs by the recently popularized but antiquated "domi-

nance theory." The method didn't work for Marley in *Marley & Me*. Kathleen Turner, playing a dog trainer, demonstrates "dominating the dog" using a choke collar. Marley clocks her, running full tilt. Let's go back to where we should be. For dogs to learn, motivate — don't intimidate. It works, and your relationship with your best friend won't suffer.

GIVE YOUR DOG A JOB: All dogs were bred to do something, from fetching ducks to herding sheep. Too many of today's pampered pooches lie around all day eating food offered by their people. There's nothing wrong with some indulgence, but let's put our dogs to work. Try playing hide-and-seek or Frisbee with your dog or teach her to search and rescue your keys. Dogs enjoy having a purpose and giving us a reason to praise a job well done.

BRING DOWN HEARTWORM: Give your dog or cat its monthly medication to prevent this disease. Heartworm disease, which is passed by mosquitoes, can be fatal.

SCOOP THE POOP: Be a good neighbor and pick up after your pup. **W**