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IS A PIG FOR YOU?

Here's what you need to know before getting a pig as a pet.

By Margaret Littman

They're cute, affectionate and intelligent. Is a porcine companion right for you? We asked the experts to answer your most pressing pig questions:



Q: I don't have a yard; can a pig live in my condo?

A: Probably not. Some municipalities (and condo associations) prohibit livestock as pets. Even if it is allowed, Matthew Edson, DVM, at Rancocas Veterinary Associates in Mount Holly, N.J., says happy pigs have access to space where they can roam, root and roll in the mud. A few acres is ideal, but at the very least you want a secure fence, shade, water and room to play.

Q: What about those cute teacup pigs I see on the Internet?

A: You can't believe everything you see online, and Bruce Lee, DVM, at

Lee's Veterinary Hospital in Cullman, Ala., says the existence of a mini pig is one of them. Yes, some breeds, such as Kunekune, Tamworth, and Gloucestershire Old Spot, have been cross-bred to make smaller pigs. But a "miniature" potbellied pig is still not mini. It might not be an 800-lb. farm hog, but by the time it is full-grown, it could weigh anywhere from 80 lb. to 150 lb. Some smaller pigs are underfed to keep them from growing or are much younger than advertised. Edson says that size is the No. 1 reason he sees clients rehome their pet pigs.

Q: What veterinary care does Petunia need?

A: It depends on where you live and what other animals are in your home, but

likely she'll need rabies, parvo, erysipelas and Leptospirosis vaccines. Scabies is a common parasite of pigs and can be transferred to humans, so veterinarian care is essential to keep those mites at bay. Injuries due to obesity and congenital hernias are not uncommon. Pet pigs should be spayed or neutered as well.

Pigs need their hooves trimmed, and male pigs need their tusks trimmed. The frequency of hoof trims depends on their lifestyle. If you're taking daily walks on a sidewalk, then annually may suffice. If your pig is mostly in sand or soft dirt, its hooves may need to be trimmed every three months. Tusk trims generally need to happen yearly. While a hoof or tusk trim is something that might be possible at

home, Edson says it is tough because pigs like to squirm and squeal and are hard to restrain. Having veterinary staff help hold them on their backs makes the process easier.

Because few veterinarians specialize in pigs, Edson recommends you talk to your veterinarian before you adopt that pig, instead of waiting until there is an emergency. Some of Edson's clients drive as far as four hours for treatments. In addition, Edson recommends owners of piglets get their new pets used to getting in the car while they are small. Pigs can be stubborn, and forcing an 80-lb. pig to go to the veterinarian can be a challenge. A pig that has grown up getting in the car will be more inclined to enjoy the ride. ▶

Real Pig Facts

- 1 It's called "blowing," not shedding. In spring or summer your pig "blows its coat" and new hair comes in. For all practical purposes, it is like your dog shedding: lots of vacuuming needed.
- 2 Pigs love to eat (it is not just a cliché).
- 3 Pigs aren't fast growers. It takes about two years for a swine to come into its full weight.
- 4 The squeal is real. "Pigs are very vocal creatures when they don't get what they want," says Matthew Edson, DVM.