

The predicament of pet supplies aplenty

T



The pet industry is booming. According to the American Pet Products Association (APPA), in 2016 we Americans spent \$66.75 billion on our pets. Food, supplies, and over-the-counter medications constituted 64 percent of the total sales that year. The APPA also estimates that expenditures increased four percent in 2017, with \$29.7 billion just in pet food sales and another \$14.93 billion in pet supplies and OTC medication sales.

Pushing these sales are brick-and-mortar stores and online retailers that make shopping convenient, but not necessarily easy. With the endless selection of products available today, how do you choose what's best for your pet?

Try to shop smart by paying attention to your pet's particular needs. Is he destructive with toys and bedding? Does he have food or skin allergies? Does he need help with potty training? Does he pull on the leash when you walk him? If you know the answers to these and other questions concerning the health and behaviors of your pet, you'll be able to make better choices when purchasing products.

Crate vs. cage: A plastic airline crate is an all-around good selection for a dog enclosure. The solid walls create a more den-like environment, tapping into how a dog's brain is wired to feel secure. Walls also inspire a puppy to "hold it" while in the confined space.

Inside the crate, a dog should be able to stand up and turn around, but too much space inside can be an invitation for accidents to happen. A metal cage can be transformed into a better housebreaking tool by fitting it with a custom canvas cover or positioning the cage in a corner of a room.

Litter box vs. litter pan: Some cats prefer privacy when eliminating. A litter box shields them from prying eyes, making them feel more comfortable and less likely to have an accident in the house. With the opening turned toward the wall, it can also prevent dogs from sticking their heads in to pull out "prized" cat poop.

But some cats are reluctant to use the box because other family felines lie in wait to ambush them as they reappear from within. Using an open-style, lid-less pan can make a cat look less suspicious, thus less likely to be pounced on by others. Large cats need more room in order to successfully hit their litter target -- a jumbo-size litter box or pan is a good option.

Plastic vs. stainless-steel vs. ceramic bowls: Plastic food and water bowls are hard to keep clean and often cause allergic skin reactions on a pet's muzzle. They're also easier for playful dogs to pick up and swat around as if they were toys. Stainless-steel and ceramic bowls are very washable; stainless bowls with rubber bases are more spill-proof, but there's a risk of breakage with ceramics.

Plain vs. cute plush toys: Walk into any pet store and you'll find rows of adorable stuffed toys for dogs and cats. As a general rule, the more realistic-looking the stuffed animal, the less durable it will be. Arms and legs, eyes and ears are quickly ripped off, and stuffing oozes out. Simple silhouettes (bone shapes and balls, for example) without appendages aren't cuddly but will last longer and are cheaper than more elaborately designed plush toys. Those without stuffing are also more durable, as are toys made of tough, bite-resistant material.

Choose Wisely

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
February 2018

Nesting beds vs. orthopedic beds: Cats and small-breed dogs love cozy nests -- beds with high walls to rest against. Large-breed and giant dogs have a lot of weight and pressure on their joints while lying down and need the support of an orthopedic bed. Its egg-crate foam relieves stress on aging or arthritic areas like elbows, knees, and hips. Products with removable, washable covers are a must-have. If a dog is clean in a crate, use a simple plush or rip-resistant mat that fits right inside it.

Flat-style leash vs. retractable leash: Retractable leashes are big sellers but can cause big headaches (see “[Regrettable Retractable](#),” March 2015). Harder to control than traditional leashes, retractables can quickly zoom out, putting dogs in harm’s way. Rope burns, cuts, and amputations aren’t uncommon, for both pets *and* humans using them. They also encourage pulling behavior. You can’t go wrong with six-foot, single-ply, cotton or nylon flat-style leashes. They’re standard obedience training tools and the safer walking option.

Cheap vs. pricey pet food: Inexpensive pet foods are made with nutrient-deficient ingredients. Steer away from foods with grains listed as the first ingredients, unless your pet is on a medical diet (special vet-prescribed diets are expensive but usually feature corn or rice). Chicken, fish, and meat as main ingredients raise the nutritional quality, as well as the price, of pet foods.

Janet Goodman is a Miami Shores-based dog trainer and principal of Good Dog Bad Dog Inc. Contact her at info@gooddogbaddogmiami.com.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com