

Choosing a Boarding Kennel

Need to go out of town? A boarding kennel can give your pet quality care – and can give you peace of mind. Before loading Fido or Fluffy into the car and over to the nearest kennel, though, it's important to find the right kennel and prepare your pet for boarding.

What are the pros and cons of using a boarding kennel?

Your pet depends on you to take good care of her – even when you have to be out of town. Friends and neighbors may not have the experience or time to properly look after your pet, particularly for longer trips. So next time you leave your pet behind for awhile, leave pet care to the professionals, such as a pet sitter or boarding kennel.

A facility specializing in care and overnight boarding allows your pet to:

- Avoid the stress of a long car or airplane ride to your destination
- Stay where he's welcome (unlike many hotels)
- Receive more attention and supervision than he would if home alone most of the day
- Be monitored by staff trained to spot health problems
- Be secure in a kennel designed to foil canine and feline escape artists

Potential drawbacks to using a boarding kennel include:

- The stress related to staying in an unfamiliar environment
- The proximity to other pets, who may expose your pet to health problems
- The difficulty of finding a kennel that accepts pets other than dogs and cats
- The inconvenience of the drive over, which can be especially hard on a pet easily stressed by car travel

How do I find a good kennel?

Ask a friend, neighbor, veterinarian, animal shelter or dog trainer for a recommendation. You can also check the Yellow Pages under "Kennels & Pet Boarding." Once you have names – even ones you got from reliable sources – it's important to do a little background check.

First, find out whether your state requires boarding kennel inspections. If it does, make sure the kennel you are considering displays a license or certificate showing that the kennel meets mandated standards.

Also ask whether the prospective kennel belongs to the American Boarding Kennels Association (www.abka.com or 719-667-1600), a trade association founded by kennel operators to promote professional standards of pet care. Besides requiring members to subscribe to a code of ethics, ABKA offers voluntary facility accreditation that indicates the facility has been inspected and meets ABKA standards of professionalism, safety and quality of care.

Check, too, with your Better Business Bureau (www.midsouth.bbb.org or 901-759-1300) to see whether any complaints have been lodged against a kennel you are considering.

After selecting a few kennels, confirm that they can accommodate your pet for specific dates and can address your pet's special needs (if any). If you are satisfied, schedule a visit.

What should I look for?

On your visit, ask to see all the places your pet may be taken. Pay particular attention to the following:

- Does the facility look and smell clean?
- Is there sufficient ventilation and light?

- Is a comfortable temperature maintained?
- Does the staff seem knowledgeable and caring?
- Are pets required to be current on their vaccinations, including the vaccine for canine kennel cough (Bordetella)? (such a requirement helps protect your animal and others)
- Does each dog have his own adequately sized indoor-outdoor run or an indoor run and a schedule for exercise?
- Are outdoor runs and exercise areas protected from wind, rain and snow?
- Are resting boards and bedding provided to allow dogs to rest off the concrete floor?
- Are cats housed away from dogs?
- Is there enough space for cats to move around comfortably?
- Is there enough space between the litter box and food bowls?
- How often are pets fed?
- Can the owner bring a pet's special food?
- What veterinary services are available?
- Are other services available such as grooming, training, bathing?
- How are rates calculated?

How do I prepare my pet?

Be sure your pet knows basic commands and is well socialized around other people and pets; if your pet has an aggression problem or is otherwise unruly, she may not be a good candidate for boarding. Before taking your animals to the kennel, make sure she is current on vaccinations.

It's also a good idea to accustom your pet to longer kennel stays by first boarding her during a short trip, such as a weekend excursion. This allows you to work out any problems before boarding your pet for an extended period.

Before you head for the kennel, double-check that you have your pet's medications and special food (if any), your veterinarian's phone number, and contact information for you and a local backup.

When you arrive with your pet at the boarding facility, remind the staff about any medical or behavior problems your pet has, such as a history of epilepsy, or fear of thunder. After the check-in process, hand your pet to a staff member, say good-bye, and leave. Avoid long emotional partings, which may upset your pet. Finally, have a good trip, knowing that your pet is in good hands and will be happy to see you when you return.