Pets ned lots of love

Before asking Santa for a pet this Christmas, there are a few things you should know. **Heather Zubek** talks to experts about what it's like to own a pet and what it takes to be a responsible pet owner.

> etting a surprise pet for Christmas is exciting and having a pet can be a rewarding experience but what happens when they get sick or they poo on the carpet?

> Dr Melissa Claus, a specialist vet and lecturer in small-animal emergency and critical care at Murdoch University spoke to ED! about the responsibilities and care of our favourite pets.

> "There is a lot of additional responsibility, both time and financial, that we don't think about when we see those beautiful fluffy creatures," says Dr Claus.

"This is something that really needs to be thought about before giving a pet at Christmas."

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PET

Dr Claus says that all pets need to be fed a proper diet, have fresh water and regular check-ups with a

"Some dogs with long hair need to be brushed frequently or taken to the groomers to be clipped," Dr Claus says.

"All dogs need lots of attention in terms of giving them loving support. If you're away at school for many hours a day, they may not be happy about

Dogs also require supplies such as leashes, collars, tags and they need to be registered with the council. Cats can be a little different.

Dr Claus says that while they don't require daily walks like dogs do, cats need plenty of indoor space to explore as well as an area to escape to if they are being chased by a baby brother or a dog. Cats also require care such as cleaning out litter trays and places to sharpen their nails.

THINK BEFORE BUYING

Before you start buying that kennel or birdcage for your new pet, take a moment to think about what it means to be a pet owner.

Dr Claus says that owning a pet means making a commitment of time and money.

"Dogs will need more time than a cat and a puppy will need even more time."

Dr Claus suggests talking to pet owners to see what having a pet is really like.

HOW MUCH IS THAT DOGGY IN THE WINDOW?

If you have your heart set on a pure-bred dog or cat, it is a good idea to visit a breeder and get a feel for the kind of operation they have.

"If you get there and they have 50 or 60 puppies or kittens in runs and the place doesn't look clean and the animals don't look like they are well cared for, you will want to stay away," says Dr Claus.

Dr Claus says once you visit a breeder and are happy with what you see, don't choose the small cute 'runty' puppy or kitten. They could have a congenital disease that they were born with.

"You want to get one that is healthy and bouncy. The boldest and biggest is the best way to go."

"But I can't stress enough that there are so many pets in shelters and pounds that are not wanted by their homes anymore. These animals make incredible pets," says Dr Claus.

PETS ARE BEST

Dr Claus is a specialist in emergency and critical care for small animals, so she tends to see pets at their worst, when they are really sick. She has witnessed how strong that bond between owner and pet can

"The best things about having a pet is that they are non-judgemental, they are always going to love you, always going to be there for you and they are wonderful support creatures. There have even been scientific studies showing that having pets lowers blood pressure and relieves



households own a pet. • There are 5 million pet dogs and 4 million

 In Western Australia, 57 per cent of households have pets.

Australia, about the same number as humans. More than 62 per cent of Australian pet cats in Australia. Source: Animal Medicines Australia, 2016

> MY PET! ED! spoke to a group of young West Australians Georgia Magnay, 7 of Kununurra, and her

pet pony called Buck Son of a Gun, or Bucky, go on all sorts of adventures together. They go to rodeos, and compete in barrel racing, bush trail rides and in the Kununurra Agricultural

For a show Georgia wears her "fancy horse clothes" and Bucky wears his special bridle.

It takes a lot of work and commitment to look after a pet

"We have to clip Bucky, brush him and pick his hooves. Every two months the farrier (a person who takes care of horses hooves) comes and clips his feet."

Bucky eats grass but he also eats a special hay called Tropical Rhodes Grass which is grown by Georgia's Poppa. Luckily, it's mango season in Kununurra so Bucky gets to gorge

Georgia and Bucky get up to all sorts of fun together. "One day he walked into our house. I think he was looking for a bag of carrots!"

> Anne Clarke, 14, also from Kununurra, lives on a small farm with many pets including her own horse, dogs, geese, turkeys, chooks, ducks and guinea fowls. But it is her pet goat called Ian that gets into more trouble than all the other pets put together.

"Ian has eaten my homework and notes as well as Mum's books," says Anne.

"He is like a dog; he goes on a lead and we can take him places." Anne has had Ian since he was a kid (baby goat).

He is now 14 months old. "We have to hide the dog biscuits because lan wants to eat them all the time and they might make him sick.

"We also have to keep the toilet door closed!" Anne says that a goat needs lots of space to run around and play so anyone with a small garden

Sisters Abigail. 8. and Emily Mannion. 6. from **Geraldton**, own a cat and a dog.

The sisters look after their pets together but because Abigail is more of a cat lover she cares for nine-year-old Midnight the cat, or Middy for short. Emily has more to do with eight-month-old Charlie, the

The sisters say that it is important to feed and water their pets and spend time patting and playing with them as they need lots of love. They find that cats don't need as much attention as dogs, as dogs need

Emily finds Charlie a little silly because he likes to eat flies while Middy just purrs and loves to be patted.







Anne Clarke with her pet goat, Ian. Picture: Elise Van Aken

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Emmerson Griffin, 13, of **Geraldton**, is the proud owner of a dog, cat, budgerigar and fish.

"BB is my dog and she is nine although she doesn't act like it," Emmerson says.

"Quiney is my kitten who is nearly a year old and then there is Budgie Boy, who is actually a girl, and is about six years old.

"Quiney is a very hungry cat who wants to eat all the time. We have to feed him cat biscuits throughout the day, so he doesn't scream at you with his cute but annoying meow. His water and litter tray need to be changed every day as well."

"Budgie Boy is quite easy to look after because she just sits and plays around by herself but her food and water need to be changed most days."

But there are other needs to be considered, especially during the summer.

"In the boiling hot summer in Geraldton we spray off the back porch with the hose to keep it cool, so BB can lay on the ground and not get

Brothers James. 8. and David O'Toole. 10. from Kalgoorlie have a rabbit they've named

Dark Claw, due to the bunny having black claws. Not only is Dark Claw a handsome little rabbit, he's an escape artist as well. The nine-month-old keeps escaping from his rabbit run preferring to explore the family's backyard.

Dark Claw belongs to both James and David with the brothers taking turns in pet care. "You must keep his food and water bowls very clean and treat the rabbit like he's your own son,"

says David. "Fresh straw is essential, and you must keep their potty tray clean.'

The brothers say that rabbits should never be given chocolate or too much lettuce to eat otherwise they get sick.

"He is so soft and cute and cuddly," James says.

James and David think having a rabbit as a pet is

Austin Randall, below, from South Lake in Perth, sadly lost his pet guinea pigs recently.

"I feel pretty upset that I do not have them to hug if I'm sad," Austin, 11, says. Tracey Woods is a vet nurse and pet-loss

bereavement counsellor with Pet Eden. She provides support and guidance to people when they lose their beloved pet.

If a pet is diagnosed with a terminal illness, Tracey suggests that their owners create a "bucket list" of activities they would like to do

"Things like having photos with Santa, creating some hand and paw print art or taking your pet on an adventure to the rive Tracey says. When a loved pet dies

Tracey says that talking with family and friends is very important.

"Journaling or drawing may help with the sad feelings you have when you have lost a pet friend."

There are many things you can do to keep the memory of your special pet alive. Tracey suggests holding a little funeral or planting a

special tree and decorate



the soil with hand painted rocks, glitter or crystals.

"Writing a letter to your pet, thanking them for being part of your family, all the things you loved about them, and what you will miss about them, too, is a good idea."

