

It's Responsible Pet Owners Month.

Everyone knows that the 14th is a time to think of love, yes. But for the whole month, and every minute, who really loves you more than your dog, cat, or other furry or feathered friend? We've read books and watched movies where dogs or cats are lost, hundreds, even thousands of miles away, only to be guided back home by pure instinct, through many travails to a heartbreakingly beautiful reunion. Heck, even if your pet only leaves the house to go to the yard for a pit stop, you couldn't do without them in general, and their nuzzles and purrs tell you the feeling is mutual.

But, like everything that is worth having, there is work involved. Since nearly 10,000 years ago when humans first started keeping pets, our animals have had needs like ours: shelter, food and water, robust health, and most importantly, love. It is up to the owner (or "pet parent") to provide these things at a level beyond reproach. Too many pets are neglected and abused in the U.S. and around the world, so this month, outdo yourself in being a force to reverse that trend.

HISTORY OF RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERS MONTH

The exact start date of Responsible Pet Owners Month eludes our research, but a look at the organizations connected to similar observances makes us confident that "our" February covers a lot of sub-categories that may be a little on the overspecialized side elsewhere. For example, the American Kennel Club sponsors a Responsible Dog Ownership Month, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has a Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month, and perhaps not so coincidentally, each February the American Veterinary Medical Association advertises Pet Dental Health Month.

We like to think that Responsible Pet Owners Month is a big enough umbrella to stretch over all that and more.

The macro breakdown is simple: for this month, take a close look at how you meet your animal friend's needs. Is the food you give them high quality, and given in portions that are optimally healthy? Does your pet get enough exercise? If they don't always stay in the house, can they be properly identified if lost, then discovered by a neighbor or other kind soul? How is the amount of exercise and socialization your pet gets? And finally, are you in the habit of bringing your non-human "child" to the veterinarian, not just for emergencies but at least once a year for a check-up?

These are the key components of responsibility when it comes to pet ownership. Do your due diligence for a small portion of your joint life with your pet, and the rest (cover your dog's ears) is gravy. Together, with everyone observing Responsible Pet Owners Month, the vast majority of owner-and-pet teams will be happy and serene.

RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERS MONTH TIMELINE

1860

"Finally, something good!"

Recognizing the need for canines to be fed according to their biology, not a human's, businessman James Spratt develops the first commercially available dog food.

1000 A.D.

While emperors had pugs in their sleeves

Pet ownership becomes common among wealthy Europeans and the word “pet” (taken from “petty,” or small) is introduced into everyday vocabulary.

1000 A.D.

Pharaoh's feline friend

The ancient Egyptians begin welcoming cats into their homes to hunt mice to protect their stored food.

10,000 to 6,000 B.C.

“There's nowhere I wouldn't go with you ...”

The first recorded burials of humans with their canine or feline companions take place in the Middle East.

RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERS MONTH FAQs

Responsible pet ownership means not only making sure your pet is fed and uses the bathroom, but also giving them the love and attention they require, not overfeeding them, making sure they get exercise, and keeping them safe both when you're home and away at work.

You can promote responsible pet ownership by leading by example for your friends, family, and online followers as well as calling out when you witness maltreatment of pets.

Pet owners are responsible for the well-being of their pet, that means researching the type of care your pet requires, keeping up with their vet appointments, training, giving them love and attention, and feeding them on time.