

Estate Planning for Pets

In some households pets are key members of the family and any [estate plan](#) that doesn't address their needs would be found incomplete. An important first step in this process is to discuss your desires with the person you wish to care for your animals after you are gone. There are several questions you should ask yourself and discuss with the potential caregiver.

- Will you care for my pets?
- Is there a limit on the number or type of pets you will care for?
- Can you manage the additional expense of the pet?

The simplest solution is to include a bequest in your [will](#). This allows you to leave your pet to another person you know will love and care for them after you are gone. If you have a variety of pets you can leave their care to various individuals. Leave the dogs to the dog lover and the reptile to the reptile lover. If it is merely overwhelming in quantity then having discussed how many animals each person feels they can handle is the key to success. If you wish the bequest can include a gift of money to help care for the animals.



You can create a pet trust during life or in your will. You leave your pet and certain funds or property for the care of your pet to a "trustee". The trustee is responsible for the care of your pet. In some cases the trustee manages the financial aspects while a different person is the actual animal caretaker. A pet trust gives you a great deal of power by allowing you to specify exactly how your pet should be cared for in your absence.



There are a number of programs in place to care for pets after their owners have passed away. Texas A & M University has the Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center where pets are cared for in a home like environment. All programs require a donation based on a variety of factors.

You should always have contingent plans for the care of your animals. The person you have named may be willing but unable to care for your pet when the need arises. The programs you have selected might no longer be in existence. Be sure to select alternate caretakers to name in your will or trust documents. This planning will ensure your pets are cared for in the manner you choose.

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