

Respect all creatures this holiday season

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At this busy time of year it is important to remember all of our loved ones, including the pets and animals in our lives. We too often take for granted the many roles animals fulfill. They provide us with so much pleasure and comfort. They give us unconditional love. They respect us, following the rules of our households - well, most of the time, at least. We need to be mindful of their needs too. What makes your pet happier than a pat or a hug?

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There are also those animals that feed us that are too often taken for granted.

There is an etiquette in how we treat all animals.

First, there are the animals we live with, our cats, dogs, birds, horses, etc. There are a few situations of which to be mindful. Children often move at a fast pace and pets can inadvertently get in the way. Take the time to explain to all family members, particularly the youngest ones, that running and playing around animals may cause them anxiety. The natural animal reaction may be a snap if stepped on or shoved out of the way.

Keep your pet's routine as regular as possible to avoid unnecessary stress. Come to think of it, that's not a bad rule of thumb for the children, too!

Second, there are all those cute puppies and kittens on Santa's list for good boys and girls. But a pet is probably one of the worst possible gifts during the holidays, and the weather this time of year is far from ideal for rearing a baby animal. A stuffed version is a far better choice at this time.

It is a cute, romantic idea to give a child a puppy or kitten, but it can be disastrous. Small children and small animals are not necessarily a good combination.

Do your research before buying a pet. Irresponsible breeders at puppy mills or cat farms often produce animals of poor quality, both physically and mentally. Half of the animals produced in pet factories die before they reach the pet store.

Please do not support this horrid industry. Give a stuffed animal instead, with the hint that a live puppy carefully selected from a responsible breeder or, better yet, adopted from the local animal shelter may follow in the spring or summer.

Consider the animals we depend upon for our holiday feasts, including turkeys, geese, cows, pigs, etc. Why not show them an extra measure of respect this holiday season by making sure nothing goes to waste? Prepare dishes with leftover pieces of meat and poultry such as soups, stews or casseroles. These are delicious, economical ways of using all of the animal.

In other parts of the world, food animals are revered, not callously farmed as they often are in North America. All parts of the animal are consumed. Famed Canadian chef Michael Smith recently filmed a show in Sweden, where they eat reindeer. Every part was meticulously used.

We can show our gratitude for the bounty of the holidays by not chucking the turkey carcass. Consider making soup with the leftovers that don't end up in yummy hot turkey sandwiches. If your choice for

Christmas dinner is ham, there is nothing better than pea soup. It's very easy to make, so invite the children to help, too.

This holiday season remember the animals in your lives. Remind your children to pat your pets often, and lovingly. It has been shown that a healthy relationship with pets reinforces our ability to have healthy relationships with people. Cherish this valuable interaction.

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