



EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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4-H Pet Care Projects Teach Responsibility to Youth

Pets bring a lot of joy to the homes where they live. When young family members help take care of pets, they learn valuable responsibility skills. 4-H provides tools and learning opportunities for youth to develop those skills.

4-H pet care projects include Cat, Dog, Guinea Pig, Rabbit, and Small Pets. Small Pets can include a wide range of pets, including caged birds, tropical fish, lizards, turtles, hamsters, gerbils, and more. 4-H manuals accompany each project, and they contain educational information and suggested activities as ways to learn more.

University of Illinois Extension staff in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties provide many ways 4-H members can learn about caring for pets: workshops, special interest 4-H clubs, dog obedience classes, and exhibit opportunities at county 4-H pet shows. 4-H members may also give talks or demonstrations at the club level about their pets, where they share what they have learned.

Pet care was the focus of a recent 4-H Spark Camp session. Spark Camp is a series of online workshops for area youth. For this one, youth were invited to have their pet(s) attend the meeting with them.

"On the day of the virtual workshop, we discovered it was National Pet Day!," explained Janis Blout, Fulton 4-H program coordinator. "This was a wonderful coincidence. It was a lively, interactive workshop where much good information was shared."

Workshop topics included pet needs: shelter, food, water, medical care, identification, love, and more. The meaning of words like domesticated, feral, stray, adoption, spay/neuter were taught, as well as what it means to give a pet a forever home.

"We also discussed how they could help animal shelters in their area, and two families requested contact information on their local shelters following the session," Blout said.

Youth can learn more in-depth pet care through dog obedience classes and special interest clubs that are held in our four counties. Skilled volunteers lead the weekly, hands-on trainings that are held from four to eight weeks, depending on the program. "Practice and praise are big factors in successful dog training," stated Blout.

According to a national pet owners survey, approximately 68 percent of all U.S. homes have at least one pet. Forty-three million homes have at least one dog, and the number of homes with at least one cat is just slightly less than that. "In Fulton County, we currently have 64 pet-related projects for this 4-H year," Janis mentioned. Across the four counties, during the 2019-2020 4-H year, a total of 128 youth enrolled in 160 pet care projects.

Pets are family members, and 4-H members who take pet care projects are going the extra mile to learn more about caring for these important members of their families.



Pet care 4-H projects provide ways for 4-H members to learn responsibility while spending time with their furry family members. Peoria County 4-H member Max was asked to talk about how he cares for his guinea pigs at the recent 4-H Spark Camp session on "Pet Care."

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