

Simple Ideas to Improve Your Cat or Dog's Quality of Life

One of the key phrases at our house is “quality of life.” It’s the deciding factor on many purchases as well as actions that involve our animals. Whenever we get a new species (there are about 10 at our house!), we try to figure out what would do the most to increase their quality of life.



By Mark Robison

For instance, with two desert tortoises we acquired, we soon realized they loved to create burrows at night to keep warm. So we dug them each a cinderblock-lined den in a small hill. We also stumbled upon the fact that their favorite food is cantaloupe – they come running as fast as their prehistoric legs will carry them when they see it. During summer, they get a few small pieces every night at dinner.

Cats and dogs can feel like such a regular part of life’s scenery that it’s easy to overlook special things for them that aren’t food related.

We just tried something over the holidays that greatly improved daily life for our cats. It was so simple I don’t know why we didn’t think of it before: We used metal plant hangers to install birdfeeders outside our living room window where the cats can monitor them from atop an end table and the back of a loveseat. They now sit there frequently awestruck, especially Tegan. She is content to watch and isn’t interested when we open the patio door, perhaps because the birds fly away then so there’s nothing to see.

Cats love heat, whether it’s lying in a sunbeam on the floor or napping on clothes fresh out of the dryer. We’ve got a cat climber in front of a window and it gets a lot of use, but one thing we did that was a big hit involved repurposing an old bath towel. We folded the towel so it was long, narrow and thick – exactly the dimensions of a windowsill. Then, because it kept falling off, we got adhesive Velcro tape and stuck the towel onto the windowsill. Our shy cat Haydee sleeps on it every day, hidden behind the curtain from the rest of the house’s action, but in the sun and able to watch the world go by.

As for dogs, the best thing you can do to make them happy is spend time with them. And if you watch them for any length of time, you’ll figure out other ideas. Our pit bull mix Thoreau loves going for a walk after a fresh rain because all the scents are heightened. Romping in fresh snow is another favorite. Whenever those rare opportunities arise in the high desert, we make sure he gets to take advantage.

An easy, cheap toy for dogs is to take an empty 12- or 16-ounce plastic soda bottle, put it in an old sock, tie the end closed on itself, and start a little game of tug so your dog knows it’s a toy. The fun part – for them – is that when they bite down, the plastic makes a loud crunching noise. And when they destroy it, it’s simple to make another.

Many dogs like short trips, too. BringFido.com lists 59 restaurants in the Reno area where I’m at and likely many where you live, too.



And when it does warm up, a 45-inch plastic kiddie wading pool filled with water is always a huge hit. It's one of the best \$10 gifts you can get for your dog.

Mark Robison is Senior Consultant at Humane Network. He was an award-winning senior editor at the Reno Gazette-Journal daily newspaper for many years, and he has been President of CockadoodleMoo Farm Animal Sanctuary since 2007.

