

# Essential Guide: Pets

Being an eco-friendly pet owner

**Tim Greenhalgh**





# Simple changes for planet-friendly pet owners

## Eco-conscious habits that cut pollution

**We can help our pets** become more eco-friendly with a few simple changes that won't cost the Earth.

These changes don't have to be disruptive. A few small adjustments is all it takes to keep pets happy and make a big difference to the environment.

### Let's talk about your pet's food

Pet food accounts for around a quarter of the environmental impacts of meat production in terms of the use of land, water, fossil fuels, phosphates and pesticides.

This is amplified by the growing habit of buying our pets highly priced and the choicest cuts of red meat or fish. We all want to give our pets the best because we love them so much but with a little careful thought we can reduce

environmental effects and keep them happy and healthy.

Our pets give us so much back for our "investment" – they are great companions for so many people, particularly those living alone and the elderly and dogs also can help

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“...Could insect protein be the answer!?”

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**“Save money  
and reduce waste  
by measuring  
out your furry  
friends food.”**



to keep us fit by getting us out for a daily walk while studies show that they contribute to improved mental health and stronger engagement in the local community.

What's more, pets seem to have a very beneficial effect on young people's development, particularly when entering adolescence, helping to improve self-esteem and other positive qualities

So the best way we can give them what they need is to make simple, small changes and best choices

that also make a big difference to the planet.

The “choice cuts” of meat and fish have a much higher environmental impact but

there is no scientific evidence that they are actually healthier for dogs and cats. It's more eco-friendly and certainly no worse to select pet foods that are made from meat by-products, offal, chicken or rabbit.

We know that cats have to have a meat diet to survive and thrive and while dogs can manage without meat protein, we need to make sure they have the right balance of nutrients, through a comprehensive mixed diet, choosing sustainably sourced food brands.

It's good to bear in mind when

making the food choices for our pets that chicken has a lower carbon impact than beef. We can also check that food made with fish is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which ensures that it is sustainably fished. The blue MSC eco label is only applied to wild fish or seafood from fisheries certified to the MSC Fisheries Standard.

This means that fish and seafood with the blue label come from a fishery that has been independently assessed on its impacts on wild fish

**1**

**When it comes to food chicken has a lower carbon impact than beef.**

**2**

**Did you know? The blue MSC eco label only applies for fisheries certified to the MSC Fisheries Standard.**

**3**

**Did you know? An average cat owner might use up to 1,000 food pouches every year!**

1

**Did you know?**

At least 8 million tons of plastic end up in the oceans every year!

2

**Waste plastic**

makes up 80% of all marine debris

3

**An easy way** to help reduce this, is to swap to eco poop bags

populations and the ecosystems they're part of.

More commercial pet foods are now using insect protein, which is more sustainable – and they might even be a better choice. According to the British Veterinary Association (BVA), insect-rich foods may be healthier for pets than prime steak – and they're better for the environment too.

It's true that pet food made with insect protein can be more expensive than traditional products but it is definitely more eco-friendly. It is estimated that insect-based foods use up to 98% less of the land and 4% of the water per kilogram of protein than meat or fish farming. This means less environmental stress and reduced carbon emissions.

There's also the big and growing challenge of plastic pollution

attached to the pet food industry. If you think that an average cat owner might use up to 1,000 food pouches every year, and that there are nearly 11 million moggies, that adds up to a staggering amount of plastic waste which is very difficult to deal with.

Pet food pouches are made with a flexible plastic material which most councils and local recycling centres cannot recycle. But there are recycling schemes for cat food pouches in the UK and you can always switch to tinned cat food or safe forms of dry food that you can buy in bulk so it's often cheaper with less waste in the long run.

Another eco option, which might seem a bit extreme but worthwhile, is to make your own dog food. If you do choose to go down this route, it's definitely worth consulting your vet before you make any changes to the diet. Your dog needs 40 essential nutrients, so getting the balance right is not the easiest of tasks, and "home-made" is not always the healthiest and best option. Avoid just choosing recipes you find online – these most likely have not been professionally tested.

It's easy enough, however, to reduce your pet-focused impact on the environment by making your own pet treats and there are plenty of recipes and tips online for your cat or dog. These will be safer as they are not going to be the primary source of nutrition for your pet and this sustainable do-it-yourself choice reduces waste from packaging. It should also avoid use of ingredients like environmentally damaging palm oil.

Whatever you choose, it's good to ensure you weigh out food accurately to take care of your pet and at the same time reduce waste. It's so easy to hurt our pets

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**“At least 8 million tons of plastic end up in the oceans every year!”**

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by being too generous. Pet obesity is the number one issue facing vets, according to the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) and one study advises that 60% of animal vets cite obesity of pets as their biggest concern, so accurate measurement of the food you give them is really important, along with regular weight checks.

## Let's talk about the less glamorous side of dog walking!

In the quest to reduce plastic overuse and its devastating effects on the environment, it's also good to invest in sustainable, plastic-free options. Reducing the amount of plastic waste is one of the most pressing problems we face.

At least 8 million tons of plastic end up in the oceans every year and waste plastic makes up 80% of all marine debris from surface waters to deep-sea sediments. It's the most widespread problem affecting our marine environment, threatening ocean health, food safety and quality, human health, coastal tourism, and it contributes to climate change.

Cleaning up after our pets is one big source of plastic pollution. Pet poop management is nobody's idea of fun but it's a labour of love and essential to keep the local ecology in good shape. Pet waste harbours disease and through runoff can pollute water systems and coastal areas, which has an impact on wildlife.

The single best eco-friendly

switch you can make is to buy biodegradable waste bags. The standard single-use plastic bags fill landfills and pollute the seas, harming birds and marine life – and they take hundreds of years to biodegrade.

Ditch those and buy compostable bags like the Beco Pets Home Compostable Poop Bags. These are made from corn starch, which is converted into polymers, so the bags have the same strength as plastic with none of the carbon footprint.

Investing in a Beco Pets Bamboo Poop Bag Dispenser also makes good eco-sense.

It's lightweight and made from a combination of bamboo, corn starch and rice husks, a natural by-product from rice farming. More sustainable but as strong and durable as plastic, the material will decompose naturally when finally disposed of.

## What about your pets food bowls?

Not so long ago, plastic was the go-to material for so many pet products but it's a relief to know that this is changing fast. There are choices that cause less harm to the environment, like the Beco Pets Bamboo Dog Bowl and Beco Pets Bamboo Cat Bowl.

These food and water bowls are manufactured using a combination of bamboo, corn starch and rice husks, a natural by-product from rice farming, and they will last for years. And when they've done their

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### Did you know?

Cornstarch and bamboo can both be used as alternatives to plastic!

2

**Once cut down,** bamboo grows back just like a weed and absorbs 35% more CO2 than regular trees!

3

**Cornstarch** has exactly the same strength as plastic but fully biodegrades, leaving no chemical nasties behind!







“Did you know?  
Some standard cat  
litter can be toxic...  
making for a  
very unhappy  
moggy!”

work, you can recycle them fully.

We sometimes think of bamboo as a tree but it's actually a grass that's hardy and prolific. There are over 1,600 species found across the globe which thrive in a wide range of climates from the hot tropics to cold mountain ranges. And they can reach up to 35 metres (115 ft) tall, with a diameter of 30 cm (11 inches).

Versatile and valuable, this woody plant is the fastest growing in the world. With bamboo, you can definitely watch the grass grow - 1 inch every 40 minutes - with some species, more than 910 mm (36 inches) a day.

Bamboo is also a sustainable and ecologically sound crop, compared with timber for example. About 40 million hectares (99 million acres) of the Earth, mostly in Asia, is covered with bamboo and because it grows densely in clumps, it eases pressure on land as a lot can be grown in relatively small spaces. On average, you can crop around 60 tonnes per hectare, compared with 20 tonnes for most trees, and 2 tonnes for cotton.

### Let's talk about what's in your favourite felines litter tray.

Along with feeding our pets in a planet-friendly way, and clearing the dog poop without using plastic, we also need to think about how we manage our cats' waste. Much of the cat litter available is produced using silica clay, which has a big environmental impact as the strip mining processes used can destroy local environment, displace wildlife through habitat loss and contaminate water tables.

Standard cat litter has also been linked to health problems as the silica and chemical-laden dust that can be toxic to humans and animals. It's clearly better to choose eco-friendly options made from safe and degradable wood shavings, recycled newspaper, and fibrous material from renewable wheat, maize and tree-nut crops.

### What about those pesky ticks and fleas?

There's also the challenge of keeping our pets clean and healthy in an eco-conscious way. We all want the best for our pets so want to keep them clean, free of ticks and fleas and smelling good. But it's a fact that many sprays and repellents as well as shampoos and conditioners, contain chemicals and nerve agents that can not only be harmful to our pets but also to wildlife, while environmental runoff

and chemical pollution can



also affect rivers and seas.

It's good to use eco-friendly alternatives including flea combs and D-limonene and linalool citrus extracts as well as organically-made shampoos and sprays that are non-toxic and free of dyes and parabens. You could even try making your own using non-toxic ingredients such as castile soap, vinegar or olive oil.

But it's worth bearing in mind that most dogs will be happier with fewer baths, and often just using water. That certainly will save on the use of any eco-friendly, recyclable shampoos while also helping to prevent skin irritations.

### **You can even go eco at playtime!**

We're also seeing rapid growth in the pet toy market with even more electronic toys for dogs and cats, including devices that guzzle electricity all day. It's a natural thought to want to buy the best for your pets but digital toys are no guarantee of fun and lasting happiness! These devices have

## **“Unsurprisingly, most dogs will be happier with fewer baths.”**

an environmental price, from the plastic used to the electricity consumed so it makes more eco-sense to choose from the many sustainable options.

Well-chewed plastic toys can quickly end up in landfills where they'll never decompose but it's easy enough to choose toys made from natural fibres and recyclable materials like durable, non-toxic, recyclable plastic, hemp and certified materials.

Pets love old-fashioned stuff like balls, string or chews while many firms also sell toys, beds and other supplies made from reclaimed or sustainable products. You can also make your own from existing clutter. We sometimes forget that a simple ball of foil on a string can

fascinate and distract the cat for hours while dogs just love a tug-o'-war with an old towel.

### **Our final “paws for thought”**

It's also worth keeping in mind that regular check-ups at the vets for preventive treatments like as vaccination and worming also helps to reduce environmental impacts, avoiding the high carbon cost of treating some conditions.

Make sure you hang onto any treatment product, like a neck cone or a splint, or pass them onto a friend. These can be shared and reused many times, with the right hygiene and care.

Simple steps, contented pets, happy planet!



## **This guide given you paws for thought?**

Why not message your Carbon Mentor for a good old rabbit...