



**QUICK POLL**

**What date location has the highest potential for a dating disaster?**

- The beach
- Outdoor BBQ
- Picnic in the park
- Rooftop bar

**VOTE**

Would you date someone who didn't love pets as much as you do? For some, the answer is easy: No way. Read on for a deeper look into how we let our four-legged friends drive our dating life—and why that's a doggone good thing.

**By Judy Mandell**

**T**ake a walk in any city park and you'll see plenty of singles with their loved ones on a short leash — literally. For those who think of their dogs and cats as their furry kids, it makes sense to date only fellow pet lovers, or those who are at least willing to come second, right behind Fido or Fluffy.

"Here's this creature who is so happy to see you each night when you come home from work," says Charlotte Reed, author of *Miss Fido Manners: Complete Book of Dog Etiquette*. "He loves you even when you overspend on your credit card bill. He or she always seems to understand when the world is mad at you and your mother just can't get it. He doesn't criticize you and certainly doesn't tell you you're fat. When you speak, he knows exactly what you're talking about. When you're sad, he licks your tears away. You cry when he gets sick. Why? Because, in your mind, no one loves you like your dog. Having a dog is like lotto — you have to be in to win. Outsiders don't get it. So you **MUST** date and fall in love with someone who loves dogs as you do."

**"He loves you even when you overspend on your credit card bill."**

Daters who insist on fellow pet lovers have the right idea, according to Craig Malkin, Ph.D., a psychologist in Cambridge, MA. Years of research in attraction and mate selection have confirmed that attraction is strongly influenced by similarity in attitudes and preferences. "You should be sure the person you're dating is as into animals as you are," says Malkin.

Online dating allows people to be pet-specific by weeding out potential guys or gals who do or don't like animals. Kirk Sullivan from Santa Ana, CA, met his wife, Marianne, online. Marianne's profile photo was of her and her dog. "It was an adorable picture," says Sullivan. "I knew right away that they were a package deal. If a man was going to date her, then he'd better love that dog, too."

**Browse singles in your area.**

I am a

seeking

between  
 and

Located in (city/zip)

**SEARCH**

Sullivan had two dogs of his own and needed to find someone who'd love his pups as much as he did. "Four years later, we married and happily merged our doggy family as sort of a furry Brady Bunch," he says.

"Smart daters make it clear up front to new potential mates the role their pet plays in their life," says Mary Jo Fay, author of *The Seven Secrets of Love*. "For mates who disagree on pet rearing, similar to child rearing, this can be a huge gulf and is best figured out early in the relationship. "Don't

.....  
"These differences  
can lead to huge  
rifts in the  
relationship sooner  
or later."  
.....

ever buy into someone for his or her 'potential.' Accept or reject someone for who he or she is right now, because almost no one changes for someone else, and these differences can lead to huge rifts in the relationship sooner or later."

Mary Remer, founder of What a Good Dog! Inc., a dog-training business, agrees that people need to be up front in the very beginning; otherwise, there is the potential for problems down the road. "Knowledge gives people the opportunity to make choices," says Remer. Lay it out there: 'I have a dog and he's a part of my family, and this is really important to me.' Or: 'We have a lot of things in common that are great, but I can't go on with the pet piece.' People have to be honest and express themselves clearly. The last thing you want to have in a relationship is a human feeling jealous about a dog."

OK, so you rule out potential partners if they don't like your pets. But what if your intended is fine with Fido in general but can't bear to snooze with you *and* the snoring schnauzer? Would you stand firm, or could you agree to a dog-free bedroom every now and then?

Malkin has seen pet lovers who've ruled out partners who didn't want their pets in bed with them every night. "Pets, just like any member of the family, can crimp an active sex life if you refuse to set limits or lock your bedroom door once in a while," he says. "As to matters of romance, balance is everything. Owner-pet relationships can interfere with new opportunities, potential romance and increased closeness. People can turn healthy relationships with their pets into a barrier to closeness or a substitute for it."

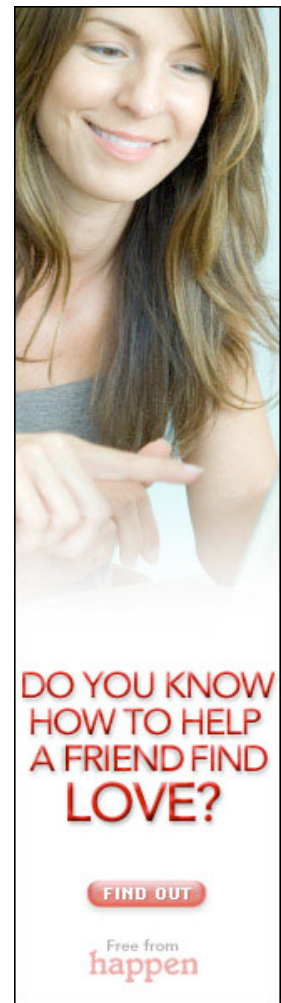
Sullivan admits that he would have ruled out anyone who didn't want the dogs in bed... or wanted to lock them out of the bedroom. However, he does lock the door once in a while because "there are some moments where you don't want a couple of cold wet noses poking you, or three puppies wrestling in bed. This is setting limits on romantic encounters, not on sleeping together at night. Once it's time to go to sleep, I'd never lock the door — and neither would Marianne."

Susan Hartzler from Los Angeles is so nuts about her dogs that she will only consider dating someone who understands that they sleep with her. She wouldn't consider any other option. "In fact, I'm currently writing a memoir that looks at the fact that I am a good judge of character when it comes to dogs but not so good when it comes to men," she says.

Some singles use their pets on the Internet as date bait. But Ana Sanchez from Baltimore contends that a dog is not just bait. "It expresses an important priority in a person's life that he or she desires to share with another special person," she says. Sanchez met her boyfriend online — they just celebrated six years together.

According to Jeff Marginean, author of *My Buddy Butch: Confessions of a New Dog Dad*, the way in which someone takes care of and treats a dog shows whether the person is capable of being a responsible individual in a relationship and can love and care for another living creature. "Sometimes it takes many dates to even begin to see this 'nurturing' capability of an individual," says Marginean. "Knowing that someone can care for dogs and really love them speaks volumes about how they will treat you. There are many benefits to getting together when both individuals have pets. They share a similar spirit. They can also teach their kids to love animals in the future."

*Judy Mandell is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in Ladies' Home Journal, Newsweek and USA Today, among others.*



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