

How Can I Show My Pet How Much I Love Them? A Vet Answers in Time for Valentine's Day

Dr. Amy Atlas VMD, the founder of City Pets, provides thoughtful Valentine's Day gift ideas for pets that will show your furry friend how much you care

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Valentine's Day is almost here! Do you know what to give your pet to show you care?

To help pet parents looking to include their furry friends in their Valentine's Day celebrations, PEOPLE reached out to Dr. Amy Atlas VMD, the founder of City Pets, for advice on how to tell your pet "I love you" through gifting.

"This is a holiday where we tell people that we love them, and we're pretty well-versed in the traditional things we give people, right? We give flowers. We give chocolate. We have special meals. We spend time together. We give presents. Not all of those are appropriate for our animals," Dr. Atlas shares, adding that chocolate especially is a no-go because it is "extremely toxic" to dogs.

When looking for a Valentine's Day gift that your pets will appreciate, the veterinarian suggests thinking of things from the recipient's perspective.

"In order to say, 'I love you,' the present has to be something super special for the recipient, so you need to start thinking more like how your pet thinks," she says.

For example, many pets adore quality time with their human companions, so "maybe we need to modify how we're spending time so that it's something more pleasurable from their point of view," Dr. Atlas suggests.



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"I recommend that people take their dog for a walk from the dog's point of view. That means when you go out for your walk, you let your dog take you for the walk. You don't take them," she adds.

A pet parent's Valentine's Day walk with their dog should include no rushing and no phones.

"Let them sniff everything that they want. Let them walk in a direction they've never gone on. Don't talk on your cell phone on this walk. Total attention is given to what your dog wants to do," Dr. Atlas says of the holiday walk.

"That's a completely different experience from what you normally do. This is a dog's point of view walk. It's a lot of fun for them, and it's kind of fun for the people, too, to see what their dog actually wants to do, rather than us being in control of it," she adds.



The loving gift of quality time can also be extended to cats through a long Valentine's Day play or cuddle session that is not punctuated with other distractions.

Pet parents looking to get their animal a physical gift for Valentine's Day should make sure the present they buy isn't really for themselves, Dr. Atlas warns.

"A lot of people will be like, 'Oh, I bought my dog a beautiful new sweater for Valentine's Day.'

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"Obviously, we don't want to give them chocolate on this holiday, and if you're sharing chocolate that gives us pleasure, but it may not be fun for a dog to wear a sweater. Maybe they need it for warmth, but they don't like putting it on and off," she says.

Instead of sweaters, Dr. Atlas says to stick to presents that will enrich a pet's day-to-day life, like a food puzzle toy that can provide pups hours of activity and fun or a multi-level cat condo that can give a feline a satisfying new view.

Dr. Atlas adds that when in doubt, giving a pet a "super high-value food" can be an easy and effective way to show you care. The Valentine's Day snack should be a pet-safe food or treat that your furry friend adores but doesn't get often.

When exchanging gifts with your pet, ensure the presents you have received stay out of your animal's reach. With a loved one in the house, keep it out of reach of dogs because it is an attractant. It's delicious, and they're going to eat it, and they're going to get sick," Dr. Atlas says.

Ingesting flowers can also make pets ill, with lilies being one of the most dangerous blooms to bring into the house.

"Any flower in the lily family is so poisonous to cats that, literally, a nibble on the leaf, the stamen, the stem, the root, can kill a cat. It causes kidney failure, and when these cats consume the flower, sometimes at the first sign that they don't feel well, we find that they have irreparable kidney damage," the veterinarian warns.

Overall, Dr. Atlas encourages all pet owners to reflect on what makes their pets happy and use those things as a starting point for what to gift their furry friends for Valentine's Day.