

Making Ripples Productive Pets

by Amanda Bancroft

Most people consider chickens to be the quintessential productive pet, and enjoy their birds just as much as they enjoy getting a free breakfast from the hens. But can other pets contribute to an eco-friendly household, too? Absolutely! Whether you live on a farm, a homestead, or in the city, the pet you choose can help you “go green”.

One example is an aquaponics system, which can be integrated into a hallway, bathroom sink, or outdoor garden bed. Using certain plants and fish (such as koi or goldfish) you can recycle your greywater through the aquarium.

Is your cell phone battery dead? If so, try charging it with a hamster. It’s a myth that hamsters are the perfect starter pet for young children, because they’re nocturnal prey animals that can nip if disturbed during sleepy daylight hours. But they do make good pets and cell phone chargers. Their exercise wheels produce biomechanical energy that can be converted to electricity. According to the BBC, one dwarf hamster species can run the human equivalent of four marathons every night on its little wheel!

If you’re like me and hate scooping cat litter but love your cats, it’s possible to toilet-train them. The cat can be taught to use a flush toilet, which is more eco-friendly than a litter box with plastic bags. Dogs can be potty trained to use their own “pet potty” (www.petpotty.net) to reduce their environmental impact.

Even though it can be expensive, switching to an environmentally-friendly pet food benefits your pet’s health and may reduce veterinary costs. Pets will benefit from fewer household toxins, too. The Environmental Working Group found that dogs had chemical flame retardants in their bodies, from their contact with beds, couches, and furniture.

Bunnies are cute, productive lawn mowers. Along with goats and guinea pigs, bunnies inside a moveable cage can mow down weeds and keep a small grassy area under control (and well fertilized) without a gas-guzzling machine. Providing your “bunny mower” with a balanced diet is still important, though.

Wildlife living outdoors can help you go green, too. Bats and purple martins are natural insect repellants and don’t come with the dangerous side effects of substances like DEET. By building bat houses in your yard, bats can be encouraged to consume insect pests like mosquitoes and cucumber beetles. According to Mother Earth News, a single bat can eat 6,000 to 8,000 insects each night!

February 20th is Love Your Pets Day. Why not celebrate by letting your pet help you go green?

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org