

If having one pet is good for our health (as studies have demonstrated), then could two pets be twice as good, or three be three times as beneficial? It turns out, the answer might be yes. Because merely petting your pooch or kitty is healthful, there's more to go around with multiple pets. Pets also make us laugh, a stress-buster that causes a release of endorphins. With two pets, there's more potential for laughter, in part because the interplay between them may be amusing. Also, there's variety in numbers. Even two Persian cats from the same litter will have different personalities, and there are even greater differences when you mix species, say, a cocker spaniel and an African Grey parrot.

Certainly, saving a life (adopting a pet from a shelter or rescue group) feels good, as it should. It's like being the Angelina Jolie of pets to adopt all those in need. I met a woman in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, who took in a sick kitten wandering the streets, cared for

The old adage "fighting likes cats and dogs" is ridiculous.

the kitty on her vacation and departed back home later than she'd planned because of the paperwork involved in bringing the kitten home to Canada. Turns out she had previously adopted a stray dog from Puerto Vallarta.

Then again, let's be realistic: Having lots of pets in the home isn't always a panacea. If they don't get along, you'll get stress instead of laughter. Also, some animal lovers have a big heart but not the pocketbook to match, and more pets means more food and more to pay in vet bills. You have to know when to just say "no," so that you won't have too many pets that you can't properly care for.

Despite the potential challenges, most of the 63% of homes in America that have a pet actually have more than one. We all know dogs are pack animals: There's an average of 1.7 pooches per dog household. And multi-cat homes also are the norm, with an average of 2.3 cats per cat household.

There are lots of ways that multi-pet households are created. One biggie is blended families. "Once upon a time, the dog or cat might go to a shelter when families came together," says animal behaviorist Ian Dunbar, who writes and broadcasts on pet behavior at dogstar.daily.com. "Nowadays, it's 'love me, love my pet.'"

Another reason for the increase is guilt. We love our pets so much that we consider them to be members of the family and actually feel guilty if the poor



The Multi-pet Household

Did you know most American homes with pets actually have more than one? Turns out more really is merrier.

little things spend too much time home alone.

Happily, dogs, cats and parrots are all social. When they're socialized to others, they are predisposed to enjoy their company. Pets aren't too different than any of us — they can get lonely. What's more, they can get bored. And that's a recipe for a disaster, or at least a sofa disaster. A bored dog's only entertainment might be eating the sofa, or a kitty might literally climb the blinds. If you have a dog that's already in the habit of ripping apart a sofa and then you con-

sider bringing a second dog into your home, remember that pets learn from one another. You might end up with a pair intent on "redecorating."

Although pets with mild separation anxiety may benefit from company, pets with serious anxiety while you're away are unlikely to be helped by the presence of another animal, according to veterinary behaviorist Gary Landsberg, of Thornhill, Ontario, Canada.

The truth is that there are some pets that just want to be alone. Examples include some dogs that

Tales from Steve's own 3-species menagerie

"The problem is that we make these choices, not the pets," Dunbar says. "So, if at all possible, let your dog decide." If you're adopting from a shelter or rescue, or purchasing from a breeder, you might be able to bring along your dog to inspect the potential newcomer. See if his response is either a tail wag or a snarl.

Of course, well-socialized dogs generally enjoy the company of other dogs. Dunbar says that based on his experience, it's best to add a new dog of the opposite sex and dissimilar in age — it's less threatening to the established hound. Another tip is for the dogs to meet for the first time on neutral turf, such as a park that your dog doesn't usually frequent.

When households merge, Landsberg says odds are the dogs may know one another because people and their pooches are likely to socialize together, an advantage that cats rarely have.

A new spouse also can mean new pets.

Dog and cat behavior consultant Amy D. Shojai, author of *PETi-quette: Solving Behavior Problems in Your Multi-Pet Household*, says: "While cats are social, they are very territorial. They rarely become instant buddies with a new cat."

If you have a cat that has lived for many years without feline companionship, a dog actually may be more keenly accepted than another cat. "In this case, the 'language' and 'cultural' differences are an advantage," Landsberg says. "That is as long as you're not adopting one of those rare dogs who wants to eat the cat and as long as the cat has had no previous experience being chased by dogs."

Dunbar says that the old adage of "fighting like cats and dogs" is "ridiculous." In fact, it's trendy to have both species — nearly half of dog owners and nearly half of cat owners actually have both.

"Giving the pets a chance to work out their differences is important," Landsberg says. "Then again, you don't want them to practice not getting along either so that [being disagreeable with one another] becomes a learned response. And, most of all, if anyone gets hurt, bring in professional help."

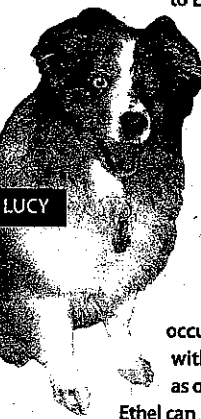
Mostly, pets do work out their disagreements — and enjoy one another's companionship, and ours.

Several months after our elderly dog, Chaser, passed away, we adopted a puppy we named Ethel. We assumed she'd get along with our 12-year-old dog, Lucy. After all, everyone knows Lucy and Ethel were best friends on *I Love Lucy*, so we assumed that's how it would be.

But that's not how it went. We also hoped that young Ethel might bring back a spark to our aging dog. But Ethel was obnoxiously playful, and Lucy wanted nothing to do with her. Her only acknowledgments to Ethel were growls and snarls.

I figured Lucy would put the crazy puppy in her place, but Ethel was oblivious to Lucy's anger. My wife, Robin, and I reluctantly stepped in, giving Ethel timeouts for her rude behavior. Over time, Ethel learned that Lucy was just not going to play.

Finally, a breakthrough occurred: Lucy initiated play with Ethel. They made mischief, as only dogs named Lucy and Ethel can (this had nothing




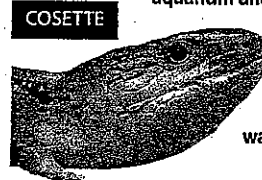
LUCY

to do with making candy, but rather pulling stuffing from a toy).

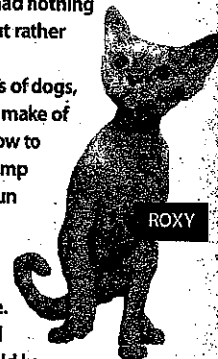
Our cat, Roxy, has met lots of dogs, but she had no idea what to make of this wacky puppy. She'd meow to get Ethel's attention, then jump to the top of the radiator or run through the barrier that kept the puppy confined to the kitchen. Ethel chased, sliding headfirst into the safety gate. And she'd do that again and again. On the other side, I could have sworn Roxy stood there crossing her paws and laughing hysterically.

Roxy likes to jump on top of the aquarium and watch our lizard, a

2-foot-long Northern blue-tongued skink named Cosette. For Roxy, that's as good as watching *Oprah*. 



COSETTE



ROXY

haven't been socialized to other dogs. Or, if you have a cat whose littermate and companion of 15 years passed away, a new kitten may not be exactly what an aging, mourning cat wants, even if it's what you want.

Before adding another pet, ask this question: Who are we *really* getting another pet for? Is it because the kids think it's a good idea, or because we miss having two cats? Think about it: Do you honestly believe that your pet wants a new roomie? Sometimes, the answer is "no way."

