

ORGANIC LIVING

By
Robert Rodale

Do Fish Make The Best Pets?

The most ecologically-sound house pet may be goldfish. Yes, goldfish.

They live in a confined space, eat very little, provide hours of enjoyment for viewers by just swimming around their tanks and never dirty a sidewalk. On top of it, if you garden, the so-called "dirty water" that comes from the fish tank is rich in plant nutrients and can be used on your houseplants with truly amazing results.

No, I'm not advocating that everyone should get rid of their dogs, cats and birds in favor of tropical fish. But it is time for people to reevaluate their pets to determine whether they constitute a drain on the family resources or make a contribution - like a rancher's sheep dog.

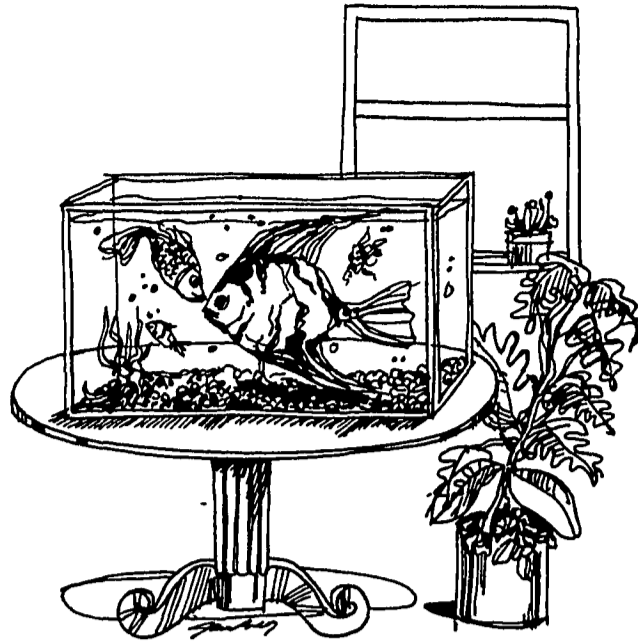
Pets are big business. In 1973, the latest year figures have been compiled, there were 20 million pet birds, 24 million pet cats, and 35 million dogs in this country. Interestingly enough, there were 2.5 billion pet fish, an indication that the old adage about man's best friend being a dog might have to be changed.

Educators admit it is now more difficult to get into veterinary school than into medical school! Graduates can look forward to starting salaries of \$20,000 or more. And established veterinarians practicing in affluent suburbs charge fees comparable to those of M.D.'s.

Big business or not, pets - in particular dogs - are becoming a problem. And part of that problem, says Bruce M. Feldmann, of the University of California at Berkeley's pet clinic, are feral dogs - domestic dogs gone wild.

"The cost of capturing and killing these dogs, plus the costs of leash law enforcement, animal shelter services and other related public and private activities come to about \$450 million annually," he says. But even then, that's only the tip of the iceberg.

Free-roaming dogs can spread more than 40 diseases, including rabies, roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms, ringworm and even fleas.



More than one million people are bitten every year. Wandering dogs cause auto and bike accidents. They dirty sidewalks, damage property and, in some instances, destroy livestock and wildlife.

Of course, not everyone lets their dog roam. But even then, a dog might be creating a problem by just being part of a household. Consider the amount of food a dog eats. Canned and dry commercial dog food costs money. The bigger the dog, the more it eats.

The needs of a dog - and a family - should be balanced against the role it performs, a large part of which can't be measured in dollars and cents. A dog protects and plays with children. Some pets have a therapeutic effect on emotionally disturbed individuals.

Household pets can be dangerous, though, sometimes even without your being aware of it. Some people are allergic to pets and come down with eye, nose or breathing problems.

A newsletter that goes to pediatricians recently noted a parasite in cats has been linked to mental retardation in children in cases where a pregnant woman came into contact with an infected cat.

And recently, an issue of the British medical journal, "The Lancet," printed a report suggesting a virus carried by infected birds may be responsible for a disease that affects the heart valves of humans. The connection between heart disease and birds was made only after extensive interviews with several hundred patients.

Animals form an integral part of our life. In an effort to become independent of a sometimes tenuous food supply,

people are turning to domesticated animals. Ducks, geese, chickens, goats, quail and even rabbits are being raised for food by an ever increasing number of people.

But those are not pets and shouldn't be considered so. For some individuals, feeding and housing such animals falls under "necessity."

Household pets are something else altogether. Maybe it is time to take a close look around your household to determine if that pet is a necessity. Is it environmentally sound to have a dog? Or a cat? Or even tropical fish? Are you endangering your family's health by housing a pet?

Just remember that if properly taken care of and loved, your pet probably presents no hazard at all.

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming Staff.)

Annual Tobacco Show Set Jan. 2nd

The Annual Lancaster County Tobacco Show will be held on Thursday afternoon, January 2nd at the Farm and Home Center in the Extension basement meeting rooms.

On the schedule for the show will be from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. FFA entries due; 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. Adult entries due and at 1:30 p.m. the judging will begin.

The classes that are being offered for the show will be the same as for the State Farm Show. Class 1 - Wrapper B's - Division A: Long Wrappers over 26 inches; Division B Short wrappers 26 inches or under.

Class 2 Filler B's - Division A - Long fillers over 26 inches; Division B short fillers 26 inches and under.

Class 3 - Binder type: Division A long vingers over 26 inches and Division B short binders 26 inches and under.

Class 6 FFA wrappers. Class 7 FFA fillers.

A hand of tobacco shall consist of 15 leaves tied with another tobacco leaf; select leaves that are uniform in size color texture and free from insect disease or mechanical damage.

All exhibits entered in the county show will be taken to the farm show unless the exhibitor requests otherwise.

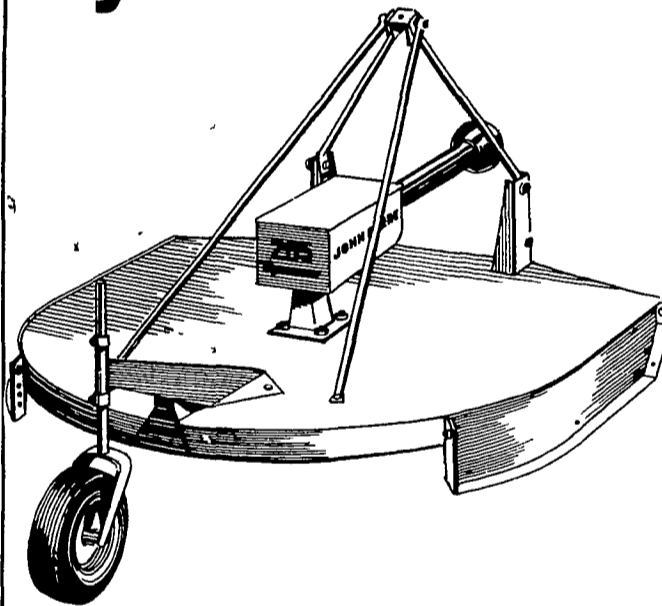
New Year's Day

In early medieval times most of Christian Europe regarded March 25 as the beginning of the year. Thus it coincided with the spring equinox. William the Conqueror eventually decreed that the year start on January 1.

New Year's Fire

New Year's celebrations vary throughout the world. Some North African Muslims light fires to leap over and thereby purify themselves from evil. Other Africans extinguish all their fires in order to ignite fresh ones on New Year's Day.

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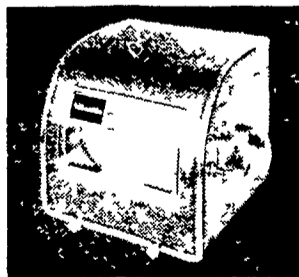
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