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See Spot go green

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

You don't have to walk on two legs to go green.

But it's we humans who decide whether to buy any of the thousands of "eco-friendly" pet products now available.

Pet owners have clearly embraced many of these products. The market for natural and organic pet food and supplies is expected to exceed \$1 billion by 2009, according to Packaged Facts, a Maryland-based market research firm.

Here in the Seattle area, the green pet trend has a large paw print. More than 30 pet-supply stores (independent shops or stores in local chains) specialize in natural foods and products. Local outlets of national pet supply chains also carry many of these items.

But it's not always easy to know which products keep your pet healthier and help the environment.

Passing the sniff test

Cats and dogs live to eat. Some have discriminating tastes, while others eat



BIG SHRIMPY

Big Shrimpy faux suede dog toys are made with 100 percent recycled fiber fill.

Resources

Treehugger Green Pet Guide: www.treehugger.com/files/2007/03/how-to-green-your-pet.php

King County Wastewater Treatment Division: www.dnr.metrokc.gov/wtd/community/oldstuff.htm

Homemade dog-food recipes: www.gourmetsleuth.com/dogfoodrecipes.htm

Making cat food: www.catinfo.org/makingcatfood.htm

practically anything. As a pet owner, you want their food and treats to please them and keep them healthy. You may be able to achieve those goals and go easy on the Earth at the same time.

Like our own food, pet food has less of an environmental impact when it's produced close to home. Shipping of products long distances contributes to global warming. Locally made pet foods include Darwin's Natural Pet Food (www.darwinspet.com) for dogs and cats, and Uneek Treats (www.uneekdogs.com) for dogs.

If you eat organic food, why not consider it for your pets? Production of food without pesticides and chemical fertilizers has far-reaching positive benefits (fewer toxics affecting farm workers and water supplies, for example).

To make sure organic or "natural" foods deliver on their promises, check the ingredients carefully. Consult fellow pet owners, your veterinarian and knowledgeable staff at your pet-supply store. Don't believe all the hype on the labels.

If you have the time and inclination, make your own pet food. You can save some cash and reduce packaging waste. The Internet offers abundant recipes and resources.

Beds, bowls and beyond

Yes, you can find a 100 percent organic-cotton dog kimono if you really want one (And no, I'm not making that up). Thousands of "green" pet products have been unleashed on the marketplace in the last few years.

But you will protect the environment more by purchasing fewer pet supplies or reusing supplies — litter boxes, dog houses, beds, bowls, leashes, toys and all the rest — than if you buy new items. That's true even if the new products contain recycled or organic materials.

To find used pet supplies, ask pet-loving friends or those at dog parks. Also search garage sales and check classified ads in newspapers or online. Be persistent. It's not uncommon to pick up used pet equipment or supplies for free, or at very low prices.

If you do need to buy a new pet product, consider those made by local companies from recycled or reused materials. Two examples: Big Shrimpy (www.bigshrimpy.com) manufactures pet beds from recycled fleece scraps, and Krebs Recycle (www.krebsrecycle.com) makes dog leashes from old climbing rope.

Save money over the long run and create less waste by paying a little more for durable products. For instance, if your dog mangles a couple Frisbees a week, look for tougher, more tooth-resistant doggie

discs, now available at many pet stores or online. For the ever-important food dish, seek out locally made ceramic bowls or sturdy metal bowls.

The back end

One of the greatest impacts pets have on the environment comes out the back end. Dogs and cats in the U.S. produce 10 million tons of waste a year, according to organics expert Will Brinton of Woods End Laboratories in Maine.

King County Wastewater Treatment Division suggests three options for dealing with pet waste: Flush it down the toilet (with no attached pieces of kitty litter); bury it on your own property, if it is not near a vegetable garden and does not affect water; or put it in a closed, leak-proof bag or container and place it in the garbage.

Reuse old plastic bags to pick up after your dog. Long newspaper bags work great. Think twice before you spend the extra money for biodegradable dog-waste bags. According to many experts, they do not degrade quickly in a tightly compacted modern landfill.

Also avoid clumping cat litter made from clay. It is often strip-mined and may contain dust harmful to cats. Instead, choose a greener kitty litter product, made from recycled newspaper, sawdust, wheat or corn.

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