

CRITTERS!

Newsletter of
South Huntsville Veterinary Hospital
Autumn 2024



A Few Minutes with Dr. Wesley

Ongoing research has led to our pets living longer than ever, and their longer lives have in turn led to new developments in treatment.

One of these new developments concerns the ideal age to spay or neuter a dog. “The sooner the better”—that is, as young as possible—used to be the standard for the best age.



However, research has shown that allowing males of large and giant breed dogs to reach maturity before neutering reduces the potential for arthritis as they age, and allowing all dogs to reach six months of age allows their nervous systems to develop, reducing the risk of complications with anesthesia.

Currently, scientists and veterinarians are still researching the benefits and detriments associated with letting a female puppy go through one heat cycle before spaying. At this time the supported recommendation is to still, if possible, spay females before their first heat cycle, not only to prevent pregnancy and pyometra, but to eliminate the risk of mammary cancer.

Note that in Alabama, as in a majority of states, a dog adopted from a shelter or rescue group must be spayed or neutered before it can be released to a new owner, no matter its age, as part of the effort to address the overpopulation of homeless animals.

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Ask The Veterinarian

I found a stray who is about two years old. He has no ID tags. He seems like a nice dog, and my family wants to keep him. I checked online and drove around my neighborhood to see if there were any “lost dog” notices, and I didn’t find any. Do you have any suggestions about what more we should do?

DR. WESLEY SAYS:

There are two major considerations.

The first is your “due diligence” in looking for the dog’s possible owners. You have looked for “lost dog” notices in your neighborhood and checked online where local neighborhood groups and rescue organizations might post a notice. You might want to post “Found Dog” signs to see if you get a response. However, if the dog is a high value purebred, do not post a photograph, and only describe the dog in general terms—just fur color and size—because people with bad intentions might try to claim him.

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Naughty Dog Fergus

Goodbye, summer! It sure was a hot one. I don’t know how you managed to get through it, but I spent it in our pool. Honey and I were out there almost every day.

We took our walk extra early in the morning while the sun was just coming up. Lots of our neighbors were out walking at that time, so we’d stop and visit here and there. Of course they’d all tell me how adorable I am. We have very discerning neighbors.

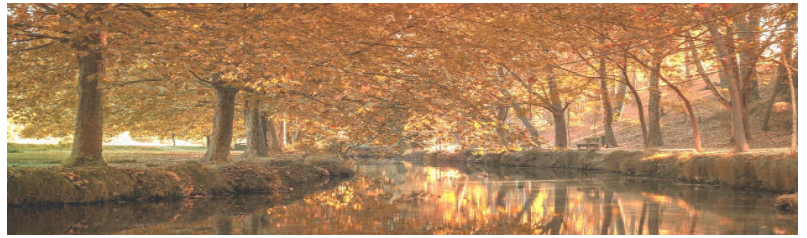
When the sun got high enough to clear the tops of the trees, we’d come back to the house for breakfast, and after that, most days, Honey would set up the pool on the deck and fill it from the hose, then get her book and sit in a lawn chair in the shade with her feet in the pool, and I’d get in the pool and walk around for a bit, or, if it was a really hot day—and we had a lot of those—I’d lie down in it. Then I’d get out and rest on my towel until I got too warm again, and back in the pool I’d go.

After the pool, we’d go into the house. Honey would work in her office and I’d take a snooze after all that exercise.

Honey also tried to grow some vegetables, but mostly she grew frustrated. She finally gave up, saying, “Between the chipmunks, deer, insects, caterpillars and mold, it was an awful lot of work for three zucchinis!” Finally in the middle of summer, she pulled out all the plants, dug up the little garden, and planted some lovely nasturtiums instead, because she said they put nutrients back into the soil. I don’t know about the soil, but the nasturtiums definitely put nutrients into the rabbits.

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Autumn Wellness Checklist

After a very long and very hot summer, keep in mind that cooler weather is *not* the time to discontinue flea and tick protection. In fact, moderate weather is peak flea season; if the temperature is comfortable for you, it's ideal for the fleas as well. And ticks are always with us. Here in the South, giving these meds all year is good, but if for some reason you do not, wait at least until after one or two *hard* freezes.

If you've seen videos of dogs joyfully bounding into a fresh pile of leaves, you might want to encourage your dog to do it, too, but only in a fresh pile of leaves, not in one that's been sitting awhile, where spiders and insects might have taken up residence. For a dog with environmental allergies, it's best to rinse him or her after playing in the yard detritus. And of course, rake up the leaves afterward.

In preparation for cold weather, some dogs might be warmer with a longer coat. Ask your groomer if your dog would be better insulated with a longer coat.



Book Review:

The Chicken Whisperer's Guide To Zero-Waste Chicken Keeping

By

Andy G. Schneider and Dr. Brigid McCrea

Thinking about keeping a small flock of chickens to provide the family with fresh eggs?

The City of Huntsville Animal Control Service requires a chicken enclosure to be a minimum of 150 feet from any building not your own, and large enough so that each chicken has 15 square feet of space.

The enclosure has to be secure enough to withstand the snakes, hawks, owls, raccoons, foxes and other predators who will all be looking to break in for an easy chicken dinner.

Still on board?

If so, buy a copy of *The Chicken Whisperer's Guide to Zero-Waste Chicken Keeping*, by Andy G. Schneider and Dr. Brigid McCrea (2019, Quarto Publishing Group, available on Amazon). Dr. McCrea is our very own Alabama Small Flock Poultry Extension Specialist, and she says that now is the time to plan for baby chicks in the spring.

An increasing number of veterinarians are looking at backyard flocks, and with a good quality enclosure, a variety of healthful food, and an overall good environment, next year might be your year for chicken keeping.

Dr. Brigid McCrea can be reached at 334/750-5213



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Ask The Veterinarian (cont'd)

Also, for a number of reasons, it's a good idea to take the dog to your veterinarian as soon as you know you want to make the dog part of your family or bring him into the household. First, your vet has a handheld device that can check to see if the dog is microchipped—that is, if he has an implant that would give a read-out of his owner's name and address.

(And I hope everyone reading this remembers the importance of changing the address on your dog's microchip when you move!)

Your vet will also advise you about the dog's general health and condition, including any necessary preventive treatment, and give you a general "read" of the dog's character. You can also discuss how best to introduce the dog to the family, including any other pets in the household.

In the rescue or stray adoption of an adult dog, the dog's background is not known, so a few sessions with a professional dog trainer can help to get everyone "on the same page."

Naughty Dog Fergus (cont'd)

The best thing that happened this summer was that I got a crate, just like the one that my friend Skipper has at his house. I don't know what happened to change Honey's mind about it, but one day, there it was. Didn't I choose the best people? My crate also has a pad that fits inside, and Honey leaves the door open all day in case I want to take a nap, just like Lacey does for Skipper.

It took Honey a few nights before she'd close the door to the crate at night. She told Charlie that she still couldn't believe it wasn't "locking me in."

I thought for a while she'd never be able to shut that door. In fact, when she first brought the crate into the house, she didn't even put the door on, just left it sitting on top of the crate, until Charlie finally noticed and mounted it on its little hinges. Then he had to show Honey that I not only went into the crate willingly at night, but when he closed the door, I was all curled up for sleep already and didn't even seem to notice. There was no way I could tell Honey how much I wanted that crate door shut. Maybe when I didn't whine or cry, she realized I was OK. For me, when we are all getting ready to get in bed and they close the door of the crate and say goodnight, that's the best time of all. I'm in my own sleeping space where no one can bother me.

I absolutely love my new crate.

Critters! is a publication of South Huntsville Veterinary Hospital.
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