

ETCETERA

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CREATURES

great and small

(Photos clockwise from left) Felicia Szuros with 8-year-old chinchilla Whiskers. A Meyers parrot named Cleo, 10 months old, at Arlington Pet Shoppe. Kate Trollope of Arlington Pet Shoppe holds a leopard gecko.

BY AMY WEST
Staff Writer

*How much is that doggy in the window?
The one with the waggly tail?
How much is that doggy in the window?
I do hope that doggy's for sale.*

The words of this popular children's tune echo the sentiments of many people who are searching for a new addition to the family.

But not everyone wants a traditional furry, four-legged pet.

For those looking for something more exotic, breeders and pet stores offer everything from lizards to parrots — with a few interesting things in between.

The relationship between a pet and its owner should be special. But it can go terribly wrong if the two are mismatched.

Unfortunately, many exotic pets are chosen on impulse — buying an exotic pet is not something that

should be taken lightly. According to Kate Trollope, co-owner of Arlington Pet Shoppe, people should make sure they do their research before selecting their new pet.

"We talk to people and try to match them with animals based on their needs and expectations," said Trollope.

"We then encourage them to buy a book about their new pet at the same time they purchase (the animal)."

Trollope also recommends having all the necessary equipment and supplies ready for the new pet's homecoming to make the transition as easy as possible.

People become interested in exotic and unusual pets for many reasons.

For some, such as Felicia Szuros and her husband, it was a matter of health.

"My husband is allergic to everything," said Szuros. "But we wanted a pet."

Enter Whiskers.

With the tail of a squirrel, ears of a mouse and body of a rabbit, Whiskers the chinchilla was the hypo-allergenic answer to the Szuros' prayers.

Chinchillas, which are well known for their soft fur, cost about \$100.

*'Newton is perfect
because he doesn't care
if I come home late,
but is great company
when I am home.'*

They have traditionally been raised for their pelts but, according to Szuros, they make better pets than coats.

A member of the guinea pig family, this quiet little creature does what any dog would normally do.

"She comes for treats, she sits on our laps and she loves to play,"

said Szuros.

Chinchillas are also very territorial and will bite at strangers. But Szuros considers Whiskers the perfect pet.

"I would definitely get another," she said.

Other people choose exotic pets because they see one on TV or in a pet store and it's love at first sight.

Jason Shoreman saw his salamander during a trip to the local pet store and just had to have one.

"People think I'm strange when I tell them I have a pet salamander," said Shoreman.

"They don't understand the attraction."

The attraction, said Shoreman, is the fact the small amphibian requires very little day-to-day care.

"He doesn't need to be walked and he doesn't shed. I work all day and go to school two evenings a week."

"Newton is perfect because he doesn't care if I come home late but is great company when I am home."

"He has the run of the apartment when I'm there and likes to sit with me while I have my dinner. "He doesn't bring me my slippers but he also doesn't wake me up at 5 a.m.," Shoreman said.

The term "exotic pet" covers a wide variety of species. There are mammals (small caged pet or larger), reptiles (lizards, snakes and turtles), amphibians (frogs and salamanders), birds, fish or insects.

Regardless of which pet you choose, there are a few things you need to consider.

The most important thing to research before buying any exotic pet is the legality of keeping that pet.

Many municipalities have bylaws regarding which types of animals can be kept as pets.

In Newmarket and Richmond Hill, keeping anything other than a dog or a cat is a violation of zoning bylaws.

The bylaw, which states people

See MAKE, page 17.

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