

Cost of Owning a Dog

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I am often asked by prospective pet owners what it costs to own a dog. Most pet owners calculate the price of the food and add it to the cost of the dog and figure that they can afford it regardless of their budget. The reality is that very few people have any idea how much owning a dog really costs and grossly underestimate it.

Why does it matter what it costs to own a dog? After all, we love our pets and we would not put a price on their health and happiness. The hard facts are that the cost of owning a dog is an extremely important consideration for a number of often overlooked reasons. The first concerns the purchase price of the dog. Many people balk at paying \$500 to \$1000 for a dog. They rationalize that they simply can not afford it and settle for a poorly bred \$150 puppy instead. What a huge mistake. The cost of a guaranteed healthy, well-bred \$1000 puppy is a fraction of what it will cost to own that dog for 12 years. A poorly bred dog with bad hips, allergies, and a not so bright disposition will end up costing you thousands more in medical bills not to mention hours of frustration and disappointment. At the same time, if you are not going to pay for a high quality purebred, then do the animal kingdom a favor and go to the [shelter](#) and get a mixed breed puppy that will be healthier and smarter than a poorly bred 'purebred.'

The second reason that the cost of owning a dog is important is that it is a big investment. This dog is going to cost you a lot of money, not to mention a tremendous amount of time. If you are not fully prepared to pay for a dog's needs and willing to spend a significant portion of your free time with the animal, then by all means do not get a dog. There are thousands of dogs put to sleep every year because the owners no longer want them or can not afford them. On top of this, there are hundreds of thousands of dogs that live miserable lives devoid of [exercise](#), interaction, socialization, and basic housing needs because people do not realize the time, commitment, or expense involved in owning and properly caring for a dog.

The third important reason to understand what owning a dog costs is that when you realize what owning a dog costs, you will take the ownership and your responsibility much more seriously. We would not dream in investing \$10,000 on a car that we know nothing about, had no warranty, we had not driven, and was completely unsuitable for our use. Yet people do this more everyday and they get a puppy without researching its breed characteristics, medical history, and parental history. And worse yet are the people that get a dog on a whim or for a child without any concept of the dog's needs and requirements, let alone the financial costs that are going to be incurred.

The following description lists the basic cost of owning a dog in several different scenarios. They include the absolute least amount it will cost for the first year, the upper level of what it could cost for the first year, and what it will cost each year for the rest of the dog's life both low and high end. It also includes what it would actually cost a tight fisted miser like me, that hates to spend money and grew up a farm, to purchase and own a 50 pound dog that lived to be 14 years old. Realize that these are basic costs and I live in the rural Midwest. If you live in a large metropolitan area you may need to double the cost and if you live in one of the top five metropolitan areas you may need to triple the cost. In addition, there is no consideration given to many other extras that come up or any consideration to your time and the monetary amount placed on the value of your time. These are rough estimates, but do not kid yourself, they are real world prices.

Product/Service	Cost 1st Year			Yearly Cost		
	Low Cost	My Cost	High Cost	Low Cost	My Cost	High Cost
Purchase Price	0	50	1000	0	0	0
Food	125	300	500	125	300	500
Vaccines	20	75	150	10	60	100
Vet Bills	40	75	400	40	125	400
Spay/Neuter	35	120	200	0	0	0
Bed	25	70	150	0	7	15

Treats	20	20	100	0	20	75
Chew Bones	20	90	150	0	20	50
Bowls	5	8	25	0	1	3
Collars	8	5	20	0	1	2
Leash	5	7	20	0	1	2
Training	15	40	450	0	10	100
Fence	0	750	1500	0	0	75
Vitamins	15	20	75	2	15	8
Flea Control	20	20	200	20	20	200
Heartworm	50	52	100	50	52	100
Shampoo	6	6	25	6	6	25
Grooming	0	0	400	0	0	400
Grooming Tools	8	8	250	1	0	25
Dental Care	0	0	40	0	0	40
Stain Cleaner	8	30	75	5	5	75
Waste Disposal	0	0	50	0	0	5
Training Aids	25	25	300	3	3	30
Deworming	6	6	30	6	6	30
Boarding	15	150	200	15	150	200
Crate	40	50	150	4	5	15
Car Restraint	0	0	100	0	0	10
Totals	\$511.00	\$1977.00	\$6600.00	\$287.00	\$807.00	\$2485.00
Total over the life of a 14 year old dog				Low Cost	My Cost	High Cost
				\$4,242.00	\$12,468.00	\$38,905.00

These totals are pretty shocking aren't they? And remember, this is the cost for a 50-pound dog that lives in the Midwest. It is not uncommon to see some of these numbers double or triple in places like New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Dallas. Now granted most people do not end up spending \$40,000 on their dog, but some spend a whole lot more. A dog with [hip dysplasia](#) or severe [allergies](#) can have significantly higher veterinary expenses and I routinely see people who spend over \$2,000 on a single veterinary problem. Chances are your costs will be similar to those I incur, but even with the minimum required care, it is still over \$13,000.00.

What do we learn from all this? Well on the positive side we Americans love our dogs and are not afraid to spend money on them. But on the more important practical side we realize that there is no such thing as a 'free' puppy. With this huge investment it only makes sense that we are very careful about [choosing a puppy](#). While I appreciate the benefits of a purebred breed, this highlights the importance of doing your research and getting a puppy that has parents with excellent hips, eyes, legs, disposition, and no history of skin allergies. Research the breeds and [choose a breed](#) that matches your lifestyle. Spending a \$1000 on a puppy may be a shock at first but if it is healthy, intelligent and guaranteed free of defects, then it is worth every penny. Puppies that are bred for appearance and not structural soundness, intelligence, health, and disposition are a dime a dozen and will often end up costing you much more than the purchase price of a good puppy in health problems and often develop serious behavioral and disposition problems as well. Remember that hard to find breeds can cost \$1000 and still be a medical nightmare. When I talk about a \$1000 puppy it includes one that is free of all inherited problems including hips, eyes, skin, and legs. The parents and grandparents should be free of all medical problems and the breeder must show proof. The disposition and intelligence of both parents should also be excellent and they should be well trained. To get this kind of guarantee you are going to have to spend a lot of money and time, and in rare breeds, it will even be more, but it can be well worth it. You can pick up any Sunday paper and find a basket full of purebred puppies for \$75 to \$300 each. It would be very unlikely that these puppies' parents have certified hips, eyes, and elbows, or are free of allergies. The parents are often not well trained and usually the owners have never even seen the grandparents. I see these 'registered' dogs every day in my clinic and they often have hip dysplasia, skin allergies, [bone problems](#), [behavior problems](#), and [eye problems](#). When you see what it costs to own a dog you will see the importance and reason why good dogs cost a lot more. Once in a while an intelligent, healthy dog emerges from the \$100 section of the paper, but as a rule, you get what you pay for and ignorance is expensive.

On the flip side of the thousand-dollar puppy is the puppy that ends up in the shelter and needs a home or 'else.' There are some real diamonds in the 'ruff' to be found at the local animal shelter. But here again, there are some disasters waiting to happen. Be smart when you choose a puppy. Remember that mixed breeds often have fewer health problems than purebreds. Choosing a mix that is a cross between two breeds you like is a great way to go. Make sure you have the dog checked by a veterinarian first thing, and do your research on the breeds before you start looking. Taking a puppy from a shelter is a great way to go, but remember that you have to really want the dog for all the right reasons, not because you feel sorry for him. All three of my current pets were rescued from 'death row' and they are all unique and have made great pets.

Remember we own dogs because we love dogs. The money should not ever stop us from caring for or taking in a puppy that needs a home, but we have to be aware of the cost and our commitment to the animal. The animal's needs have to come first! This is so important I am going to say it again, The animal's needs have to come first! Lack of funds is no excuse for not providing adequate care for an animal. If we can not meet the needs of the animal or we are not fully committed to providing the time, energy, and finances that our dog needs then we should not bring that animal into our home, period, no excuses. It just is not fair to them.