

12 Steps to Better Your Chances of Finding Your Pet

Please don't ever give up pets have been known to find their way back home after being lost for several months. *Good luck!*

Step One -

Search your property thoroughly and the property of the homes on either side of your home. Cats, small dogs, and other types of small pets can get into some pretty strange places.

🐾 You need to look in EVERY nook and cranny. Don't assume that your pet would never crawl into a tiny little space or some small hole. In fact, don't assume anything. Cats especially, because they use their whiskers to determine whether or not they can go through an opening, plus they have the ability to collapse their rib cage in order to slink into a very small space. So, for cat owners, think about the measurement or length between the left and right side ends of your cat's whiskers, it will probably be somewhere around 6 inches. While conducting your search, be sure to check any opening that is 6 inches wide because your cat could very well have gone through an opening of this size.

🐾 Look behind, under, and inside washing machines, clothes dryers, stoves, refrigerators, and dishwashers. Check behind water heaters, under furniture, in closets, in cabinets, on shelves and in bookcases, in drain pipes, in sewer drains, in boxes, in culvert pipes, under vehicles, look through the crawl spaces under the house, inside sheds and barns, and especially under decks. Even if the deck in your back yard sits right on the ground, if there is an opening that is at least 6 inches wide then your pet may have been able to crawl underneath. We actually pulled up several boards of the deck in our backyard, stuck a flashlight and a camera down through the holes and took pictures of the entire area underneath our deck. In the case of cats, also look in attic crawl spaces, on the roof, in roof gutters, and up in the trees.

Step Two -

Walk around your neighborhood, talk to everybody, and leave your phone number and a picture of your pet with everyone that you come into contact.

🐾 Go to each house in the area where your pet was lost and talk to the residents. Write down a description of your lost pet, or better yet, have flyers ready to hand out to each person, but whatever you do be sure that you give everyone your phone number. Leave the information or flyer attached to the front door, if homeowners do not answer the door.

🐾 Caution - It is against Federal law to leave flyers or any other un-stamped or un-postmarked material in someone's mailbox.

🐾 Talk to everybody you run into. This includes the postman, paperboy, children, parents waiting at the school bus stop, school crossing guards, neighborhood crime watch captains, garbage pick-up workers, etc. Give them a written description (or the Flyer) of your pet and your phone number as well.

🐾 Try to get all the neighborhood children involved. Kids are great at finding lost pets! Have a meeting with all of the neighborhood children and invite the parents to come. The information you give to them can be invaluable. At your meeting, ask everybody if they saw or heard anything unusual in the neighborhood

and carefully write down everything they tell you. This could include strange vehicles, work crews, people, or activities. Get detailed descriptions of everything.

🐾 Whenever you set out on foot to search for your pet, don't travel alone. Take a friend or family member with you.

🐾 Don't ever give out your full name or address. Scam artists and other criminals in our society can and will use this information against you and your family. Remember, it is never a good idea to publicize this information no matter what the reason may be.

🐾 Offer a reward, but don't state the amount.

Step Three -

Make some noise while you walk around the neighborhood! Animals can hear you from great distances.

🐾 Have your family members call the pet's name wherever they may go.

🐾 If your pet has a favorite "toy" that has a bell or makes a sound, bring it along and use it to help you make familiar noises.

🐾 Use a "Dog Whistle" to get your pet's attention. The high-pitched sound from these whistles can carry up to a mile or more. Cats are attracted to this sound as well as dogs. (Note: this whistle is the "silent" ultrasonic type, but has a simple adjustment that lowers the tone into the human audible range. Use this audible tone when searching for your pet because the sound will carry farther).

🐾 Carry a box or can of your pet's favorite biscuits, chews, or other treats and rattle it loudly while calling your pet's name.

🐾 Make any other noises that your pet may be familiar with.

🐾 It's also important to stop regularly, be quiet, and listen for your pet to make a noise in reply. The neighbors will think you're crazy, but hey, this is your pet's life we're talking about here!

Step Four -

Bring a powerful flashlight (even during daylight hours) for checking in dark spaces.

🐾 A frightened or injured animal will hide in dark spaces and will not come to you.

🐾 Use your flashlight for checking under houses and other dark spots. Also check storage sheds, garages, dumpsters, trashcans, and under cars. Don't forget to look in trees for a cats and other pets that access tree tops.

Step Five -

Place strong-scented articles outside your home to attract your pet. Animals find their way by scent as well as sound.

- 🐾 Place some of your dirty clothes outdoors. Sweaty gym socks and jogging suits are great for this!
- 🐾 Place a cat's litter box, bedding, and favorite toys outside.
- 🐾 Place a dog's bedding and favorite toys outside.
- 🐾 Put out some smelly food such as tuna, sardines, or warm, freshly cooked chicken, liver, or other savory meat. Be sure to protect the food if you can, so that other animals don't eat it!
- 🐾 If it's warm weather, crate other family pets and place them outside in a SAFE and SECURE area.

Step Six -

Call local veterinarian offices during the day. After 5 PM, call veterinarian emergency clinics.

- 🐾 Find out if your pet was injured and taken to any of these offices or clinics for treatment.
- 🐾 If an office has taken in or treated any animal that even remotely resembles your pet, VISIT THE OFFICE IN PERSON. Your description of your pet and their description of the same pet rarely match. YOU MUST GO SEE FOR YOURSELF!
- 🐾 Also ask them for the phone numbers of local rescue organizations. They generally keep a list and may even work with them.
- 🐾 Call each of the rescue organizations and ask for their help and find out if they have your pet. These groups generally network with each other and will pass the word about your case.
- 🐾 Be sure to leave a flyer with each of the veterinary offices you visit. If you don't physically visit each office then send them a packet containing all of the information pertaining to your pet, especially any significant medical history that may help them to identify your pet.

Step Seven -

VISIT your local Animal Control, humane societies, and animal shelters (including the ones in surrounding areas).

🐾 You must actually visit the animal control and humane shelters every day or two. It works well if several family members can take turns visiting the shelters.

🐾 Your description of your pet and their description rarely match. **YOU MUST GO LOOK!** Be sure to check all areas of the shelter, including the infirmary. Also be aware that dogs may be housed in the cat section and vice-versa.

🐾 Leave a picture of your pet and your phone number at each shelter. Befriend the workers at the shelter; you get more bees with honey than you do with vinegar.

🐾 Find out the holding period of each animal control and humane shelter. Be aware of how much time you have to claim your pet before it is euthanized!

🐾 Government Animal Control agencies usually keep an animal for only 3 - 4 days and then they either adopt it out or kill it. You only get one chance at this. **Be there!**

Step Eight -

Ask Animal Control, humane societies, and shelters about pet rescue organizations in your area.

🐾 Usually there are many small pet rescue groups that work with the local humane shelter. They often take pets from the shelter to save them from euthanasia and adopt them out to new homes.

🐾 Call the rescue groups regularly to see if they have your pet. Ask to visit their foster homes so that you can check for your pet in person.

Step Nine -

Find out if your pet has been killed on the road. (DOA reports are usually available at the Animal Shelter front desks)

🐾 This is a very sad but necessary task. Otherwise, you may never know what happened to your pet and it could haunt you for years.

🐾 The road crews for your local and state Department of Transportation will usually pick up dead animals from the highways and freeways. The Animal Control Department is usually responsible for roads and city streets. You have to call around and find out which agencies do this service in your area. Be sure to find them all!

🐾 Dogs are usually picked up within 24 hours, but cats and other animals often are not.

🐾 Call the city, county, and state road crews, and Animal Control EVERY DAY to see if they have found your pet's body. The Animal Services Department will usually have a DOA list available for public viewing, if so, you can check while your visiting the shelter to look for your pet.

🐾 If any of the agencies do not cooperate with your efforts, contact City Hall as a last resort and complain. This usually gets a response. But remember, you will get better results with courteous personal visits.

🐾 If your pet is wearing an ID tag, the DOT and/or Animal Control agencies should contact you if they find your pet dead along the road. But don't count on it. You must put forth the effort to find out for yourself!

🐾 Sadly, this section has a higher "find" rate than anything else except posted flyers.

Step Ten -

It is extremely important to post as MANY flyers as you can about your lost pet. And please ensure that YOU can be located if your pet is found.

🐾 From the point where your pet was last seen, place your posters within a **6-mile radius for cats and a 20-mile radius for dogs**

🐾 If you receive a call from someone stating that they saw your pet near his or her home or business, it will be extremely difficult to physically "hang around" this person's house or place of business, however you do have other options. You can send your flyers directly to homes and/or businesses via the US Postal Service. This can be costly but it could provide you with more sighting information. Here's how you go about this process:

🐾 You will need to have at least 500 flyers for each area that you decide to do a "mailing." They do not have to be color flyers, black and white will suffice for this purpose. To save some time, have the printer or copying service tri-fold the flyers for you; this costs about 3 cents per copy.

🐾 Title companies generally maintain current lists of the names and addresses of each homeowner in each housing subdivision in your city or town. You can purchase these subdivision databases for a minimal fee of about twenty dollars per subdivision. Call the local title companies in your town and ask if you can purchase the database for "Country Meadows Estates" or whatever the name is of the subdivision where the sighting of your pet occurred. Ask them to send the database via email. This way you should be able to convert or transfer the information into one of your database programs on your computer, such as Excel. Using the database program on your computer you should be able to print mailing labels for each homeowner in that particular subdivision. If you don't want to generate the labels yourself, the title companies can provide you with mailing labels but there is an added cost for this service. Affix the labels to your flyers and check with your Post Office for the proper method of sealing the flyers. Do not send your flyers "Bulk Mail" as many post offices only send out Bulk Mail at specific times of the month. Time is of the essence and you cannot risk waiting for your flyers to be delivered on Bulk Mail delivery days.

🐾 Overall, flyers or posters produce more "finds" than anything else. But don't neglect the rest of the tips! Your budget will determine how many flyers you can afford to post, but the more the better.

Step Eleven -

HERE IS THE TYPE OF INFORMATION THAT SHOULD and SHOULD NOT BE ON YOUR FLYER

- 🐾 If possible, it is best to place a color photo of your pet on each flyer.
- 🐾 Use 8-1/2" x 11" fluorescent paper for high visibility.
- 🐾 List the date and place your pet was lost, breed of dog or cat, sex, age, weight, color, markings, and your telephone number.
- 🐾 Offer a reward, but don't state the amount.
- 🐾 Do not put your full name or address on the flyer, just your phone number.
- 🐾 It is very important to always withhold several identifying marks and characteristics of your lost pet. You may need to use these later to verify that a person has actually found your pet and is not trying to scam you. More on this later.
- 🐾 Post the flyers on telephone or street light poles, at a level as far above your head as possible, as there are those that find it amusing to destroy posters of this type. By placing the posters as high as possible you will most likely discourage anyone from attempting to destroy your poster. Take a small step stool or ladder with you when you are placing the posters on telephone and light poles. If it is during the winter or rainy season, put your posters in "top loading plastic pages", however, you will want the opening to be at the bottom. This way you can prevent (AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE) the ink from running due to the moisture in the air. Be sure to use wide clear tape. Packing tape works very well and it is stickier than most other tapes. Tape all four sides of the poster, so that someone cannot simply stick a finger or a stick under an edge of your poster and rip it down.

Taking these extra measures when posting your flyer will give your poster a much better chance of remaining in its spot for an adequate length of time. If anyone thinks about ripping down your poster, he or she will have to through as much effort to take it down as you did putting it up. All other posters can be placed at eye level, such places as veterinary offices, pet shops, barber & beauty shops, grocery stores, community bulletin boards, churches, pizza parlors, laundromats, convenience stores, near schools, and on school bulletin boards.

- 🐾 Examine your posted flyers frequently and replace the ones that are missing or damaged.

Step Twelve -

Place an ad in your local newspaper and/or an Internet Lost and Found web site. Some will do this for free, but most of the time those that are placing Lost Ads have to pay. It is generally only free to those that are placing Found Ads.

- 🐾 Be sure to advertise in the Sunday edition as well as during the week.
- 🐾 Also place an ad in any "Penny Saver" type of publications you might have in your area.
- 🐾 Check the Lost and Found section of the main and community newspapers in your area (print and online) every day.

Respond to All Sightings if at all possible and respond to every sighting in person. Here's why:

🐾 There have been numerous instances where the lost pet's physical description has changed slightly from when the animal was in the care of its original owner. For instance; let's say your dog was not wearing a collar or I.D. tags and you receive a call from someone who believes they have seen your dog. You discuss the physical description of your dog with the caller and everything matches except for the fact that the dog they found was wearing a collar or I.D. tags. Do not immediately assume that the dog is not yours because it is wearing a collar and/or I.D. tags and your dog was not. Many times, people who have taken in a stray animal will place a collar or I.D. tags on the animal. They do this for the same reasons that you should place collars and I.D. tags on your animals. In the event, the animal gets loose, the finder will call the phone number on the I.D. tags to notify the "owner" that their animal has been found.

🐾 In the case of PET THEFT, physical characteristics are often altered on purpose. If someone has stolen your pet, the thief may very well alter certain physical characteristics so the animal is less likely to resemble its original appearance in the hopes that if people should see the cat or dog, they will not be as quick to associate the animal's description with a description seen on a "Lost Cat" or "Lost Dog" flyer they may have seen posted in the area.

Pet thieves will also make every attempt to tear down your "Lost Cat" or "Lost Dog" posters, so pay attention to posters that are repeatedly torn down or removed. If this does occur, enlist the aid of a homeowner nearby, who can see the flyer from their place of residence. Ask them to keep an eye on your poster and tell them to call you immediately if they see someone removing your poster. Ask them to jot down the following things; a description of the person or persons, a description of the vehicle and if at possible, to get the license plate number, the time of day the poster was torn down, and anything else that strikes them as being unusual or peculiar about the person(s) or vehicle. If they happen to get a license plate number, immediately call your local law enforcement and report the incident.

Do not call the police unless you are able to get the vehicle license plate number, they cannot provide any assistance to you without this information.

🐾 Below is a list of physical characteristics that can easily change or alter someone's description of a found dog or cat and you should not discount any sightings of your pet based on slight or moderate differences of the following physical characteristics:

🐾 Collars, I.D. Tags, and/or Leads.

🐾 Cats with claws as opposed to cats that have been declawed. Obviously, this characteristic can only be changed from one perspective. If your cat had its front claws, there is a possibility, especially if your cat has been missing for a number of months, that someone could have gone to the expense of removing your cat's front claws. This is an expensive procedure, and the odds are less likely that someone would put forth the expense to purposefully keep the cat from being returned to its original owner. The changing of this characteristic would more likely occur if your cat was found by someone who decided to "adopt" the "stray cat" into his or her home. So, you should not rule out a sighting of your cat based solely on the condition of "claws vs. no claws."

🐾 Hair and Grooming. Changing this facet of a pet's appearance is the easiest to achieve and generally tends to have the greatest overall effect. Here again, this characteristic can only be changed from one perspective. Obviously, pets with short hair can not be made to instantly grow long hair. However, those pets with medium to long hair can go through a dramatic change of appearance simply through the use of specific hair cutting and grooming techniques. You would be surprised just how much you can change the outward appearance of an animal even if it is

with a simple hair cut or shave. So, again, do not rule out sightings based on characteristics involving hair length or grooming. It is always "better to be safe than sorry" and check out every sighting in person.

🐾 Intact, Spayed, or Neutered. For those of you whose pet's sexual organs were "intact" at the time of their disappearance, several things may have occurred.

🐾 Ask the finder to take a photograph of the animal, especially if the traveling distance to the finder's home requires you to go out of your way to make traveling plans, i.e., a round-trip drive that may take you longer than 3 hours to complete. The finder should understand your dilemma and attempt to provide you with some means of seeing the animal before you go through the trouble of making extensive traveling plans in order to see the animal in person. And NEVER GO ALONE!

A Few Words Of Caution

There are dangerous people in our society who prey upon victims by using "found" pets as a ploy.

🐾 NEVER respond to a "found" pet contact alone. Take a friend or two along with you.

🐾 Arrange to meet in a public place.

🐾 NEVER invite the person to your home unless you happen to know him or her well.

🐾 Beware of money scams. A common one is a person calls you claiming to be a long-haul trucker. He says he picked up your pet and is out of state now. He heard about your ad, flyer, etc. and says he will return your pet if you will pay to ship it home. This person does not have your pet, he is only trying to take your money.

🐾 Don't wander around looking for your pet alone, either during the day or at night. Always bring a friend or relative. This is especially important in unfamiliar neighborhoods. Use the identifying information you have withheld about your pet. Please remember that you should never give out all of the identifying features of your lost pet. If the person who claims to have found your pet cannot describe these features to you, he or she does not have your pet!

When You Find Your Pet

Go around and collect up all of your old flyers. Don't forget to thank everybody who has helped you.

How To Protect Your Pets Now

Safeguard your pets before they are lost by following the common-sense tips below:

🐾 Pet-proof your yard fence so your cat or dog will be safely confined. Be sure to check your fence regularly for new escape routes. Keep fence gates securely locked. This is for the safety of both your pet and any visitors (wanted or unwanted). Never allow your pets to roam free in the neighborhood. Leash them at all times. Always transport a cat in a carrier. Never take your cat to the vet or anywhere else unless it is secured. A carried cat can bolt and hide if frightened by loud noises. When a cat is frightened in strange surroundings, especially with traffic noise around, it will hide and will not come to you. The same goes for dogs. Always leash them when taking them anywhere. If a dog gets loose in an unfamiliar area its chances of ever finding its way home are practically impossible.

🐾 Get some good photos of your pet now, before it's too late. Take close-up shots so that details show up well. Keep taking shots until you get a few good ones that really look like your pet. Most snapshots of pets look like any other cat or dog. You want your photos to be unique and your pet to be unmistakable. **These photos will be invaluable to you later if your pet is ever lost.**

🐾 Train your pet (cat or dog) to associate a "Dog Whistle" with pleasant things. Blow the whistle each time just before you feed them. They will then be more likely to come running to you when you use the whistle to find them when they are lost.

🐾 Always keep a collar on your pet with a tag that has your **CURRENT PHONE NUMBER** on it. A collar and phone tag are the most important form of ID you can have for your pet.

🐾 Always have a CURRENT rabies tag and pet license tag attached to your pet's collar. You can be found by the number on the tags.

🐾 Microchips are fast becoming the best form of ID for all domestic pets. Talk to your vet about a microchip implant. A chip provides positive and reliable identification for your pet and all modern shelters scan animals for this ID device. Find out which brand of chip is prevalent in your area and go with that one.

More About Rabies Tags

🐾 It is absolutely vital that your pet have a CURRENT rabies tag on it at all times!

🐾 If a county happens to be under a "Rabies Alert" or a "Rabies Quarantine" and your pet is picked up without a current rabies tag, they WILL kill your loved one! It's a public health issue, so you will have no recourse.

And Finally, Please Spay or Neuter Your Pets!

🐾 Both males and females will be much less likely to wander if they are "fixed."

🐾 An added benefit is that they will live a longer, happier, healthier life if they are spayed or neutered.