

BowWOW!

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

Dog care, for a little less

The cost of everything is creeping higher by the day and we're all looking for ways to economize. Eventually, while manipulating the budget, your eyes will turn to gaze at good old Monroe curled up at your feet. Vet bills, gourmet treats, grooming and sacks of fancy dog food...the cost of keeping Monroe gets higher every day, too. Families had pets during the Great Depression when money was tight or non-existent. How did they do it?

Sidestepping some of the "must-haves" can cut waste from Monroe's portion of the family budget without short-changing his health or lifestyle. For instance, is Monroe pudgy? Unfortunately, most dogs in America are fat. To help Monroe maintain a normal weight (you should be able to feel his ribs without pushing hard), carefully measure his food. It's that simple. A bag of dog food will last twice as long if you don't feed your dog double the amount he needs. Trust that Monroe is not going to volunteer that you're feeding him too much. Also, check the Internet for dog food coupons. One company offers as much as \$4 off a bag of chow.

Learn to do the things you generally hire out. Most people can handle basic grooming at home, from bathing to nail trims. The one-time cost of good nail and coat clippers will quickly offset the cost of monthly trips to the groomer. Check the library for grooming guides or the Internet for breed specific grooming tips and be brave. Monroe, an almost cocker spaniel, is The Family Pet and not a contender at Westminster; he doesn't need to look fabulous. He will love every extra minute you spend grooming him and will forgive you immediately for any mistakes you make. Remember, it's hair. It will grow back. Like grass. Or, you can stretch out the time between trips to the groomer for high-maintenance pets with simple daily attention to the coat—brushing, light trimming with scissors, a bath at home.

Work with your vet to cut costs. And shop around. Not all vets charge the same. Annual vaccinations are no longer recommended for dogs, but that's no reason to skip the yearly vet check. "Well-dog exams" can spot little problems before they become expensive ones. If Monroe needs a medication, ask the vet to write a prescription instead of filling it at the office. You may find considerable savings by comparison shopping at local discount pharmacies, especially if there is a generic equivalent. Also, when it comes to treating a sick dog, do some research. Explore all the alternatives before making a decision about treatment. There may be less expensive but equally effective options.

Buy smarter. Shopping for pets can be great fun but Monroe doesn't really need a wardrobe of collars. He would probably appreciate not having a wardrobe of neckerchiefs or costumes for the holidays, too. When it comes to toys, you can cut back but not out. A good chew toy has saved many a pair of shoes. If your dog likes stuffed animals, check garage sales or church bazaars before you shell out \$14 for something that is going to be shredded anyway. My kennel guests had great fun rummaging through the piles of stuffed animals I collected free from the local church sales. Remove dangerous looking attachments that might get swallowed.

Trade goods and services with other pet owners who are also feeling the squeeze. Bartered goods don't always have to be the same. You can provide one thing—such as yard work—for another, such as Beauty Day--cleaning ears, trimming nails and a bath).

Our parents managed to keep the family dog healthy and fit through incredibly stressful economic times. With a little common sense we can have a healthy, happy pet, too.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and wholeDog. She is a holistic behavior coach, a canine massage therapist (CMT), herbalist, and canine homeopath. Want more information? Have a question? Send a note to Tracie at letstalk@wholedog.biz or visit www.wholedog.biz.