

Doggie doors eliminate middle man

Let your pet hit the yard without the need for a human gatekeeper

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How many times a day would you use the door if your bathroom wasn't inside the house? Now add the times when you leave to get some fresh air, a change of scenery, or to greet someone.

Five, 10, 15 times? Whatever the number, that inconvenience is why many homeowners equip their home with a pet door.

If you want Digger or Tigger to come and go without you being the gatekeeper, here's what you need to know.

SELECTING A DOOR

With a correctly sized door, "the top of the pet opening should clear the largest pet's back and the shortest pet should not have to launch in the air to get through the opening," says Joseph Ambrose, president of PlexiDor Performance Pet Doors, a Florida company with several dealers in the Edmonton area.

Equally important are the "temperament and activity level of your pets. Very active, energetic (animals) or problem chewers can destroy some dog doors quickly. You want to choose a pet door that will hold up when in use by your pet."

Pet doors work equally well for cats and for dogs. Karel Hermary, presentation manager at PetSmart in Skyview Power Centre in northwest Edmonton, says that although some doors are designed especially for cats,

the only difference is that cat doors are "just more square shaped, whereas the dog doors are more oblong."

Homeowners should also decide where they want to install the device — in a wall or a door — and consider the security and comfort of the home.

TYPES AND PRICES

Pet doors are available in manual and electronic models. Manual doors have solid panels, or single or multiple vinyl or rubber flaps. Frames are typically aluminum or plastic.

Electronic systems have an electronic "key" that the pet wears on its collar to unlock the door. After the animal passes through, the door locks again. Multiple pets can use the door if each has its own key.

Manual door prices depend on the materials of the components and the number of flaps/panels. They start around \$40 and can reach nearly \$1,000 for high-end pet doors.

Electronic door prices range from \$200 to \$2,000. In addition to higher initial costs, electronic systems cost more to maintain and repair, due to the greater complexity of the components.

SECURITY AND COMFORT

The main benefit of electronic systems over manual, despite the generally higher cost, is that an electronic unit is more secure because



A correctly sized pet opening should clear your largest animal's back while not forcing the smallest "to launch into the air" to get through. This door is from PlexiDor Performance Pet Doors, a Florida company with several dealers in the Edmonton area.

"it is always locked when not actively opening for the pet," says Ambrose.

"The manual units have to be left unlocked for the pet to use them."

To minimize security concerns, many manual systems have a lock and key so that owners can lock the door when they choose, perhaps at night or when they leave the house with the pet.

Hermary from PetSmart says that security concerns are mainly associated with larger doors because "some of them are large enough that a small person is able to obtain entry to your home."

Homeowners should keep this in mind when deciding if a pet door is right for them. If you decide on a door, you may want to consider an electronic model or

take other security measures around the home.

Another potential concern is hot or cold air seepage. Some pet doors insulate against drafts with weather resistant seals and/or insulated flaps/panels.

Try to install the door in a zone where it's not directly in the wind, says Hermary. Or consider an extreme-weather door, which has



This dog wears an electronic collar "key" that unlocks and relocks a pet door.

extra flaps for added energy efficiency.

INSTALLATION AND PET TRAINING

Most pet-door installations require some basic tools: a drill, a screwdriver, a level and a jigsaw. Most homeowners should be able to do the job themselves.

Installation time and complexity depend on the location of the door; wall-mounted doors take longer and are more difficult to install than those going into an existing door.

As for training your pet to use the door, Hermary recommends two strategies.

"Tape the flap open for a few days so that he can get accustomed to the opening ... or put him on the other side of where you are and call to him, using bribery if necessary."

THE LAST WORD

"Do your research; see what people are saying about the product you are thinking to purchase before you cut holes in either your door or wall," says Hermary.

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