



## How About A Gerbil Under The Christmas Tree This Year?

(NAPSA)—It's a vision straight out of a Norman Rockwell Christmas painting.

There, on Christmas morning, below the illuminated tree sits a floppy-eared puppy with a big red bow tied around its neck. The children run into the room and squeal as they spot their new, four-legged family member. The day is spent amidst a playground of boxes and wrapping paper, walks in the neighborhood, naming rights, and begging Mom and Dad to allow "Snowy" (it's December after all) to sleep in Mary's room.

Now, consider this picture with a gerbil instead of a dog. No... really.

Hamsters. Gerbils. Guinea pigs. Mice. Rats. Ferrets. Rabbits. All are lovable pets that do well living in their own, enclosed environment; require modest investments of time and money; and provide years of companionship.

"Exotics," as they are sometimes known, make great pets," says Rich Whiting, vice president, American Wood Fibers, which makes small pet bedding products. "They're cute, intelligent, cuddly and relate to their adopted family more than you might think. Small pets are interesting to watch in their habitats, providing hours of enriching and educational enjoyment to children and adults alike."

Whiting explains that these small animals can be a perfect way to introduce children to the responsibility of owning and caring for pets while not disrupting the house. And the annual investment is typically 10–15 percent of that for a larger, domesticated pet. He suggests considering adoption first when looking for a small pet, as they are often abandoned or given up, and need welcoming homes much like dogs and cats.

However, animal experts warn that giving any pet as a gift might be well-intentioned but ill-con-



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ceived if the proper homework hasn't been completed. For instance:

- Who are the recipients? How old are they? What are the living conditions?
- Are they capable of caring for a pet?
- Are they willing to make a long-term commitment to the pet, and pay for its care?

Even if the answer is positive to all of these questions, there are options such as the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) "Gift-a-Pet Certificate" program that affords the opportunity to pay the adoption fee of a cat or kitten as a present. Or, as Whiting suggests, perhaps considering a pet that is lower maintenance and "exotic" might be a more appealing alternative.

So, if you're contemplating putting a pet on your shopping list for the 2013 holidays, do your research, consider adoption, and think "small." They'll look just as cute wearing that red ribbon.

For more information about pet adoption, caring for a pet and other related topics, visit Petfinder at [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com), ASPCA website at [www.aspc.org](http://www.aspc.org), The Humane Society of the United States at [www.humane.org](http://www.humane.org), or the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org).