

April 2017 Green Living Segment  
*Living With Pets in Tiny Houses*  
Robert J. Kobet

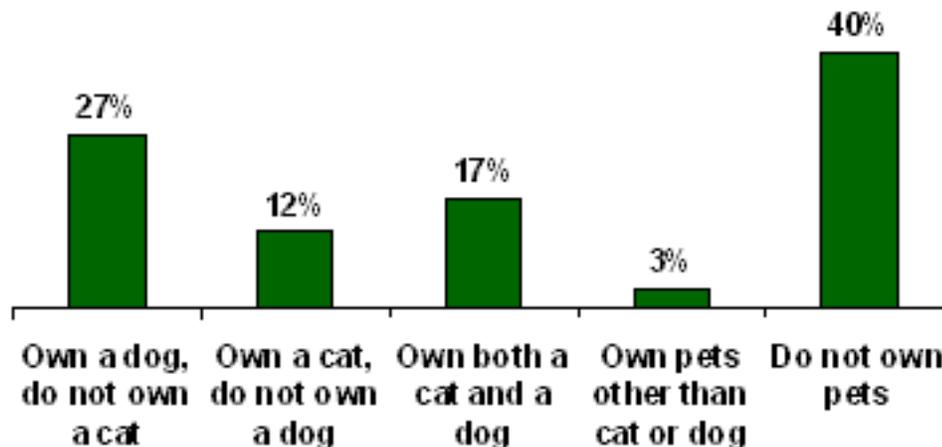
As with many things in life, there are a lot of decisions that have to be made when considering where and how to live. They run the gamut between economic and home amenity considerations, to what and whom we want to be around; location, location, location. The decision to live in a tiny house makes some choices easier, but exacerbates others. Whether or not to keep a pet in a tiny house does both.

People love their pets. Many pet owners prioritize how they spend their time and resources based on pet ownership needs and requirements. The literature is full of articles about how important pets are to the lifestyle of individuals and families. In some cases, whether or not a pet is allowed can determine if an apartment will be leased, or if community covenants will be adhered to. Conversely, having a guide dog or a special assistant or rehabilitation pet can determine whether a home can be occupied at all. When these considerations are fundamental to one's basic existence it doesn't matter what type of housing is involved; a pet is a necessity.

The ability for a tiny house to accommodate a pet affects a large portion of potential tiny house buyers and builders in the US and other countries. According to the Gallup News Service <http://bit.ly/2oCX9BH>:

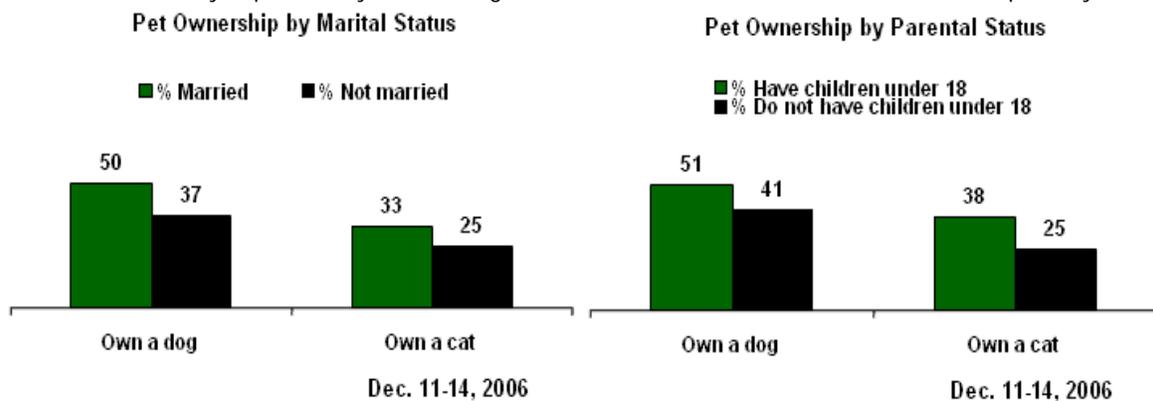
1. *Six in 10 Americans own some type of pet.* Forty-four percent of Americans own a dog and 29% own a cat. Among pet owners, 73% own a dog and 49% own a cat. The implication of this in tiny house living is discussed below. Pet ownership among the American public breaks down to 27% owning a dog, but not a cat, 12% own a cat but not a dog, and 17% own both. 3% own pets other than cats or dogs, and 40% do not own any pets.

### Pet Ownership Summary



2. *Aside from dogs and cats, 10% of Americans own a fish and much smaller percentages own birds (5%), reptiles, snakes, or lizards (2%), hamsters and guinea pigs (2%), horses (2%), and rabbits (1%).* Dogs and cats are considered active, dynamic pets. Most others are static. That is, they exist in a cage or some other container that is in a fixed location and the pets contained therein do not roam.
3. *Dogs tend to live with their owners without other canine companions; cats are a bit more likely to share their owner's home with fellow felines.* 59% of dog owners have just one dog, while 51% of cat owners are as likely to have multiple cats as they are to have just one (49%). In a tiny house the number and size of pets co-habiting with human(s) will have a pronounced effect on the day-to-day living arrangements and conditions.

4. *By a 70% to 20% margin, Americans describe themselves as “dog persons” rather than “cat persons.”* This includes a 68% to 19% margin among people who own both a cat and a dog, and a 68% to 18% preference among those who own neither. Only pet owners with a cat and no dogs routinely call themselves “cat people” (69% to 26%). In the case of tiny house living, pet ownership “identity” is not as important as what is present and why.
5. *Americans believe pets are good for their owners.* Sixty percent of Americans think pet owners lead more satisfying lives than non-pet owners, while only 3% say pet owners lead less satisfying lives. One-third of Americans say it makes no difference or have no opinion. Pet ownership can contribute to the quality of life, something tiny house occupants are often very conscious of. Conversely, an incompatible situation involving pets in a tiny house can potentially be extra stressful to pets and pet owners alike; it has got to work for both.
6. *Pets are not as common a companion for single people;* people who are married are much more likely to own cats and dogs than those who are not. There are many examples of singles and couples living with pets in tiny houses. Clearly, the more people, including children, and pets involved, the more challenging the situation becomes.
7. *People with young children are more likely than people without young children to own both dogs and cats.* This may represent the most unlikely tiny house scenario – multiple people with multiple pets. Here every aspect of tiny house living needs to be evaluated in order to maintain compatibility.



#### Typical Pet Ownership Profiles

8. *Despite research showing that pets can be beneficial to seniors' health and wellbeing, dog ownership and cat ownership both decline with age.* Pet ownership is lowest in the Eastern portion of the United States, and non-whites are much less likely to own pets than are whites. There are many reasons for this, but none are due directly to living in a tiny house.
9. *Walking the dog is more fun than it is work for many dog owners.* Most dog owners (70%) take their dog for at least one walk per day, with the average duration of that walk being about 17 minutes. Dog owners seem to enjoy this time with their pets – 85% of those who take their dog on daily walks say it is a pleasant experience for them, while 13% described it as “a chore”. This is part of a larger, general aspect of pet ownership. That is, all pets should have their basic needs provided including food, water, shelter, exercise and medical care. If an animal requires regular exercise, it most likely will not be satisfied living mostly indoors of any type of housing. It is reasonable to assume cats, smaller dogs and pets that do not need “wide open spaces,” rigorous exercise and continuous care may be happier in a tiny house than others.

In addition to who is most likely to own a pet in a tiny house, it is useful to explore *why* people own pets. According to Nischal Samji, author of a recent *Quora* post, <http://bit.ly/2oCzWiQ> there are lots of reasons people have pets, including those who live in tiny houses. Chief among them are:

- *Empathy and Compassion:* Many people keep pets out of compassion. A lost puppy, a homeless kitten, and injured parrot and so on. Any mistreated animal would be happy to live in a tiny house with a loving owner.
- *Loneliness:* Pets are definitely a way to cope with loneliness. People who cannot share their feelings and emotions with other people may keep pets as their companions and get attached to them. People who live in tiny houses are not immune to the effects of being alone.
- *Medical Reasons:* It has become a growing trend to have a pet to reduce stress and handle depression. Scientific studies prove that having a dog decreases your blood pressure, reduces stress and can serve as a bridge to healthy social interactions. These things can occur as well in a tiny house as any other.
- *Security and Pest Protection:* Dogs are kept as pets to ward off thieves and cats to ward off mice and rats. These are popular reason many people keep pets; they apply to all types of housing.

From all of this the following observations and suggestions can be made:

- *In all cases, tiny house occupants who choose to keep pets should be able to provide for their basic needs.* Dogs, cats, fish, hamsters, parrots and reptiles all require different care.
- *The personality of each breed of pet should be taken into consideration.* Large, hyperactive animals that need space to roam and regular exercise are probably not well suited for tiny house living. The same goes for those that are overtly territorial as the need to multitask spaces and share the couch are important concessions. The more mellow the animal, the better chance of getting along in a confined space.
- *There is seldom an effective "away" in a tiny house.* Cat boxes and kitty litter, feeding stations and special sleeping pads are challenging things to accommodate in small, open floor plans both visually and with respect to sanitation and adequate ventilation. The absence of a basement space or areas where pets can be sequestered means messes made by pets will be readily noticeable. Any visitor to a tiny house who is allergic to a given type of animal will almost surely react.
- Living in places where pets can be outside much of the time relieves the pressure on pets being indoors. The area under a tiny house that is kept on its trailer can provide shelter and an ideal place for a watchdog. Skirting the trailer can further improve this habitat.
- *Other things to consider* include storing pet food, grooming supplies, toys, winter protective garments, etc. Shampooing the dog will probably need to be done outside or at the local doggie salon. Once it is properly set up an aquarium need not be nearly as challenging.

Here Jenny Xie (@canonind) shows us how pet cages can be added under a counter and integrated into a tiny house storage wall. <http://bit.ly/2nb5sV9>



In conclusion, it's clear from multiple sources that pet ownership is a multi-billion dollar industry that continues to grow. More importantly, perhaps, pets are often part of who we, what we love and how we identify with each other, much like home ownership itself. The two can happily go hand in hand if expectations are realistic and the arrangement is well considered.

84 Lumber and GreenEdge Supply share your interest in tiny living. We want you and your pets to get the most out of your investment in the tiny house and each other. Find us at [www.greenedgesupply.com](http://www.greenedgesupply.com) or [www.84tinyliving.com](http://www.84tinyliving.com), visit one of our tiny houses, or stop into any of our retail outlets and let our trained sales staff answer all of your tiny living questions.

## February 2017 Green Living Segment

### *Aging in Place in Tiny Houses*

Robert J. Kobet

One of my Mother's favorite sayings was, "*We're all just passing through...*" I have referred to her many times as a compassionate realist; full of love, but tempered by a life of hardship known to many who comprise the Greatest Generation. As the mother of nine and grandmother and great-grandmother of too many to count, she served as a model of how to live a dignified life of generosity and understanding, but she was well aware of the limits of her own mortality; a fact of life we all share. She asked for very little for herself, but the one thing she made clear was she wanted to spend her last years in her own home, surrounded by those she loves. Fortunately for my entire family, she was able to do that.

According to research by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) nearly 90% of seniors want to stay in their own homes as they age. This is often referred to as "aging in place". Living under one's own rules is a key reason for staying in one's own home, with 42% of seniors choosing it as one of their top three considerations. 82% of retirees would prefer to stay in their homes, even as we begin to need day-to-day assistance or ongoing health care. 9% express a preference for moving to a facility where care is provided, and 4% would accept moving to a relative's home. Most pre-retirement adults expect they will be able to live independently during retirement, and relatively few (14%) expect they will need day-to-day assistance or ongoing health care at any time. 75% of adult children and 69% of parents think about the parents' ability to live independently as they get older. More than half of the adult children (54%) think their parents will need their help, but less than three in ten (27%) older parents agree. The fact is, any number of life's circumstances, changes in health or economic status can determine when and how much assistance in our later years may be necessary, and suitable housing remains a major consideration.

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) say 75% of remodelers report an increase in inquiries related to aging in place. The NAHB predicts the aging in place remodeling market alone to be \$20-\$25 billion in coming years. That's about 10% of the current \$214 billion home improvement industry. Much of the demand is driven by the need to live safely. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to the emergency room in the U.S., and the primary cause of accidental deaths (75%) in people over 65.

The NAHB and AARP have identified housing features that seniors find especially important in the later years as they begin to experience reduced eyesight, poorer balance, reduced flexibility, etc. Most of these features do not currently exist in most seniors' homes.

- Safety features such as non-slip floor surfaces (80%)
- Bathroom aides such as grab bars (79%)
- A personal alert system that allows people to call for help in emergencies (79%)
- Entrance without steps (77%)
- Wider doorways (65%)
- Lever-handled doorknobs (54%)
- Higher electrical outlets (46%)

- Lower electrical switches (38%)

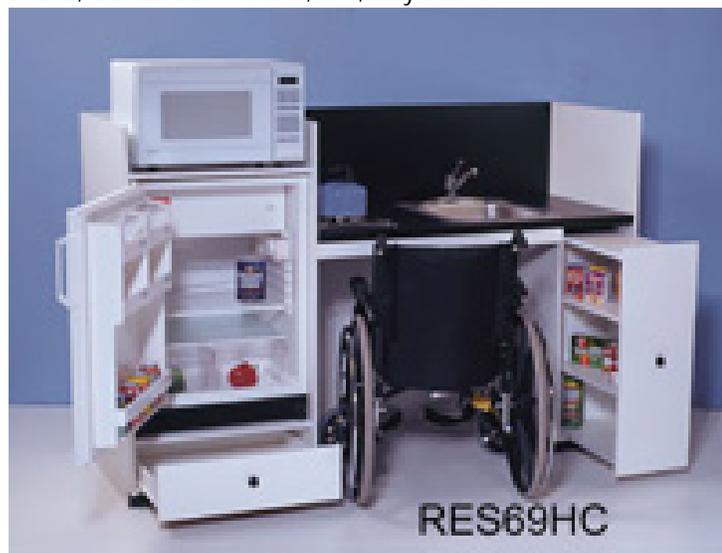
Of seniors who have made modifications to their homes:

- 70% said they did so for safety reasons
- 65% wanted to make the home easier to use by all family members
- 60% wanted to increase their ability to live independently
- 55% wanted to provide flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of family members

In the best scenario, seniors have a number of conventional housing options, starting with aging in place in their own home if their needs are met. Others include moving to a number of other places, from relatives' homes to other residences, apartments, and extended care facilities. But a more recent entry to the housing market may provide a truly unique and highly desirable housing option – tiny houses.

Tiny houses have a number of qualities and attributes that address the needs and desires of aging in place listed above. These include:

- Tiny houses are smaller by design, and therefore are easier and less time consuming to take care of. Cleaning and maintenance chores are minimized.
- The compact nature of tiny homes means the elderly can live physically adjacent to their basic needs of food preparation, hygiene, comfort, entertainment and relaxation. There is no longer a need to maintain or roam around an unnecessarily large home, or traverse stairs to go from living to sleeping spaces.
- Tiny homes are invariably built close to the ground, minimizing the need for exterior stairs or overly long access ramps. This is particularly important in locations that experience snow and freezing conditions.
- Many elderly are content to live with fewer material things as long as they have what is important to them physically and emotionally – photographs, personal gifts, special articles of clothing, a favorite chair, etc. This resonates with a tiny house's limited storage.
- A couple or individual aging in place may be able to exist efficiently and comfortably with the downsized appliances typically found in a tiny house. Stacked washers and dryers, smaller refrigerators, two-burner cook top, microwave oven, a small water heater, etc., may suffice.



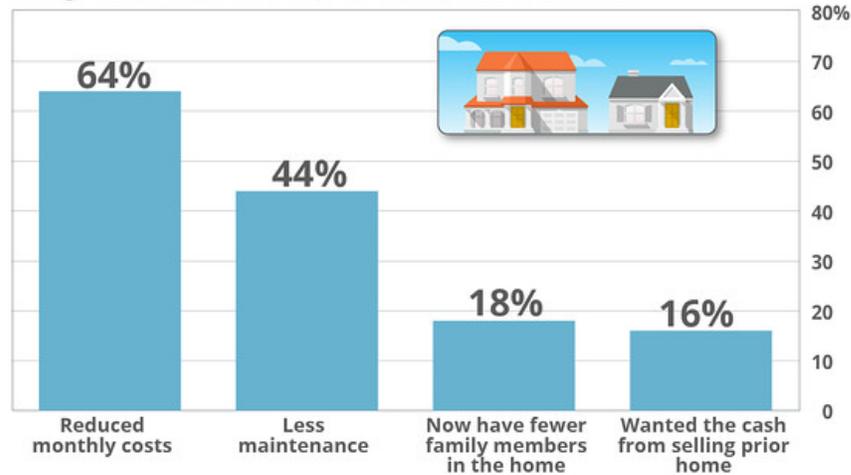
*A great deal of barrier free convenience can be designed into tiny houses.*

<http://bit.ly/2kaCqSH>

- Single floor living. Although many tiny homes are designed with lofts, usually as a sleeping space, many are designed and furnished to accommodate living on one level. See more about this below.

- Tiny houses can be fitted with a number of features that support aging in place. These include special door, window and cabinet hardware, security systems, task lighting, bathroom grab rails, and barrier free storage systems.
- Tiny homes are energy and resource efficient, which means once purchased and sited they are more economical than conventional housing. Financial stability is an important consideration when aging in place.

### Why retirees move to smaller homes



Source: 2014 Merrill Lynch Retirement Study

<http://on.mktw.net/1I152kj>

- Tiny homes can be located in a number of places conducive to aging in place, assuming local ordinances can be obeyed. These include on site or in proximity to a relative or loved one, in or near a community sympathetic with those choosing to age in place, or a location with suitable weather and life style amenities.
- A tiny house can be relocated. This may not be a major consideration when aging in place, but the ability to relocate is there if needed.

Tiny houses easily accommodate anyone who is not physically impaired. And, while aging in place includes the reality that we all eventually succumb to lessening physical prowess, tiny houses can be designed to be barrier free, thus accommodating an occupant in a wheel chair or scooter. The primary considerations are:

- A barrier free bathroom or personal hygiene area designed using the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Guidelines. This is a good idea in any circumstance, but essential if the occupant is wheel chair bound or otherwise physically restricted.
- Sleeping accommodations that do not rely on a loft space. Main level sleeping is easily accommodated, and caregivers and / or guests can use the loft.
- Access to overhead cabinets and storage must be carefully designed to enable direct access, or access assisted by a device that makes everything reachable.

I have written a February 2017 GreenEdge Supply blog titled *A Barrier Free Tiny House*. My research proves tiny houses can accommodate aging in place, however challenging life's circumstances may be. 84 Lumber and GreenEdge Supply and dedicated to providing quality tiny house living to everyone, in any phase of life. Contact us at [www.greenedgesupply.com](http://www.greenedgesupply.com) or stop into one of our 84 Lumber retail outlets and let our trained staff answer any of your green living, tiny house questions.