

# Finding the Perfect Pet Door



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# Why should I get a pet door?

**A pet door can be a great boon to the whole family. It can free humans from worry and save on heating and cooling, and it gives pets freedom and access to the outdoors.**

Before ordering a door, there are some decisions to make. Such as, what type of door it should be, what size would be the best, and where it should be installed.



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# Should I have a manual or an automatic door?

**Most pet doors sold and installed are manual. That is, the pet pushes the door open when going through. This type of door is cost effective and available in all imaginable sizes, qualities, and price ranges.**

Automatic pet doors open when a pet with a key comes close enough. The key is often an RFID tag or a magnet that attaches on the pet's collars.

While there is no guarantee other pets can't sneak in or out along with the pet that has a key, only the key can make the door open.

There are also automatic doors for cats and small dogs that open for the pet's microchip.



# Is there a pet door that can let the dog out while keeping cats in?

**No door can guarantee a cat can't get out with the dog; the cat waits for the dog to go through.**

Even if you have an electronic door that requires a collar key, a cat may run outside when the dog opens the door. Cats are smart and quick and will run in front of the dog, under the dog, or behind the dog. We have even seen photos of cats running under the belly of a dog using an electronic pet door.

One solution could be putting the dog door in a room with just one entrance from the main house. At the entrance of this room, put an indoor electronic cat fence. Pet Stop and DogWatch make these types of systems.



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# What size pet door should I get?

**Dog doors and cat doors can look small from a human point of view, but the door opening doesn't have to be as big as the pet standing upright.**

The opening width should be a little wider than the widest part of your cat or dog.

The height should be as tall as from the top of the shoulders to the chest just behind the front legs. The pet will duck their head to push the door open, and lift their legs to go through.



If you have an older pet that has problems lifting their legs, you might want to go up a size.

If you have small and large animals using the same door, you might also want to go up a size, to get the opening close enough to the floor for the little ones to get through. More about this later in the book!

To make sure you're getting the right size, cut out the opening size in a piece of cardboard and see if your pet can get through without problems.

Measuring a dog's height can be quite taxing for both dog and person. Call your dog, and when they're standing next to you, mark the height of the shoulder by touching your own leg. This way you can measure on yourself. Much easier!

# What pet door material is the best?

**Plastic, Vinyl, K9-Composite** – there are many pet door materials to choose from, along with a few different ways to construct the door. Which is the best depends on where it should be installed, what type of pet will use it, and how long it's expected to last.

A pet door has two main parts: the frame and the flap.

## The Frame

A pet door frame is made from plastic or metal, and has two main purposes: attaching the pet door to the house door or wall, and holding the part that will open for the pet.

Frames are made from plastic or metal.

Plastic frames are low cost and can work very well for cats or gentle dogs. There is a risk that they'll break or warp, and some dogs will chew them.

Metal frames are sturdy and last for many years. A door with a metal frame will cost more to purchase, but will last longer than a door with a plastic frame.



## The Flap

The flap is the part that opens. It can be made from plastic, vinyl, or K9-Composite.

## Plastic Flaps

Plastic flaps are low cost. They're made from PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride) and generally mounted on a plastic frame. These doors last for about five years for cats and between two and five years for smaller dogs.

The flaps are ridged and many doors have a pile weatherseal to help keep outside weather from affecting the indoor climate. Plastic flaps can work fine in snowy climates where the temperature doesn't drop below 0 F (-18 C), but below this temperature, the plastic becomes brittle and cracks easily.

If you only plan to be in your house or apartment for a couple of years, a plastic flap can be a good choice. The best installation is through a house door or with a window kit – making a hole through a wall is much more permanent, and for such a big installation it's worth investing in a higher quality door.

Doors with plastic flaps work well for cats and small dogs, but are not recommended for energetic breeds such as terriers and herding dogs, or large and powerful dogs. Charging through at full speed wears plastic flaps out, and the door will require service often.

## Vinyl Flaps

There are two types of vinyl flap doors.

### 1. Cut from large sheets

The Better Quality Vinyl Doors have flaps cut out from large sheets of vinyl. The material was manufactured in a controlled manner; cooled slowly in a process that allows the vinyl to normalize. That means the flap will hang true and not bend when the weather changes.

These doors have magnets in the door frame and a piece of steel riveted onto the flap, allowing the door to stay shut. They function well in

temperatures above 20 F (-7 C) but are not recommended for very cold climates such as Canada or Alaska. Depending on the pet, most owners need to change flaps every 5-10 years.

These doors are excellent for households where a giant breed dog and a cat uses the same pet door. A door large enough for a 220 pound (100 Kg) dog is heavy, but the vinyl flap becomes light enough for the cat to open a corner at the bottom of the door.

They're also excellent for older dogs who are unable to lift their legs and jump through; the flap is so light that the dog can use an oversized door, mounted just an inch off the floor.

## 2. Injection molded

Injection molded vinyl flaps are less costly to produce than the ones cut from large sheets. You can recognize these flaps through magnets embedded in the material. The manufacturing process makes them prone to lose their shape and many owners need to change the flap on a yearly basis. Thus, the door has a low up-front cost, but can become expensive in the long run.

Pet doors with injection molded flaps work well in mild climates. If you live in an area with stable temperatures and no snow, this can be a good starter pet door. There are several brands making door units, wall units, and even patio panels with this type of flap, and they are suited for screen enclosures around patios.

## **K9-Composite**

K9-Composite is an acrylic alloy created for pet doors – the material is similar to airplane windshields. These doors have a higher up-front cost than plastic or vinyl flaps, but they also last longer. The service life of a panel made from K9-Composite is 20-30 years.

A pet door made from K9-Composite can withstand sunshine, cold

weather, wind, and items hitting it at full speed. It is perfect for large or energetic dogs who will hit the door at full run, and the doors can even take a hard ball thrown at them without cracking.

The temperature operation range is -50 F (-46 C) to 150 F (66 C), so this is the right door for extreme climates.

The PlexiDor is the only brand using K9-Composite.

The doors can be installed through house doors or walls, and the long life make them a good choice for permanent installations. The doors are perfect for very cold climates such as Canada, Alaska, Minnesota, and Michigan. These doors are not recommended for areas where the dogs or cats step directly onto sand.



## Pet Door Comparison Chart

	PlexiDor	Plastic Flap	Molded Vinyl	Sheet Vinyl
Low Maintenance	★★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★
Installation Speed	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Outer Finish	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★
Interior Finish	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★
Low Initial Cost	★★	★★★★★★	★★★★★★	★★
Low Life-Time Cost	★★★★★	★★	★	★★★★
Energy Efficiency	★★★★★	★★★★	★	★★
Elegant Look	★★★★★	★★	★	★

Have questions about which door is right for your pet? Call us at 800-749-9609

# Can a small and a large pet use the same door?

**It depends on the type of door, but in most cases, a cat or small dog can use the same door as a large pet.**

A very large flap door might be too heavy for a small pet to open, but even then, they usually figure out how to lift a corner. Electric doors will open for any pet with a key. If you're considering the PlexiDor, the panels swing so easily that most cats and small dogs can use even the extra large door.

Cats are agile and figure out a way to get through even if the door is far from the floor, but if a large and a small dog share the same door, make sure the lower end is low enough for the smaller dog while keeping the top high enough for the tall dog.

We recommend that the dog door is installed with a 2 inch clearance from the top of the dog's back to the opening of the door. If that makes the threshold too tall for the small dog to step over, you can add a step in front of the dog door to make it easier for the little dog, or step up a size and buy a bigger door.

Plan the installation height from the inside of the house, not the outside of the house. This is because there's usually a drop-down from the inside to the outside - even if you measure from the foundation, the flooring will add to the difference in elevation.

Measure the tallest dog to the top of their back. Call the dog to stand next to you and mark the height on your own leg with your finger. It's much easier to measure on yourself than on the dog. Add two inches to this measurement to get the desired top opening height.

## Example:

22" Measurement of large dog at top of back  
+2" Clearance for dog's back not to hit the dog door  
=24" Height of desired dog door opening

Subtract the height of the dog door opening, for instance 16".

$24" - 16" = 8"$  height from the interior floor for the dog door install opening

Now you know how high the door must be to accommodate your tall dog. The next step is figuring out if the small dog can get through. Measure your smallest dog from the ground to the belly.

If the dog is too short to use the door and you choose to put a step in front of the door, make sure it's small enough to not get in the big dog's way, yet large enough to help the smaller dog through.

If there is a drop-down from the inside of the house to the outside, you may have to add a step on the outside as well.



# Where should I install the pet door?

**A pet door can be installed through a house door, a wall, or even a window. Choose a spot that's convenient from the inside of the house - and that lets the pet out in the right place.**

Many choose to install their pet door in a house door, because it's a fairly simple installation and easy to restore – just replace the door. But, there are other options.

Many pet doors are available as wall kits and can be put through pretty much any type of wall. This is a bigger installation where the level of difficulty depends on the material in the wall, and most choose to get help from a professional. The end result can look phenomenal.



Things to keep in mind when choosing a spot for a wall installation is not going too close to the windows – and watching out for things like electrical wiring, pipes, and AC duct work. It's a good idea to choose a backup installation spot in case "Plan A" falls through.

There are patio pet doors, and it is possible to install pet doors through glass, for instance a window or a sliding glass door. Doing this requires a new pane of glass – the pane you already have is tempered and can't be cut. Some pet doors come with complete kits, there are cat doors that come with a pane and fit in a window much the same way a window AC unit would.

Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or to get advice.

# What will it cost to have a pet door installed?

**Installation prices will vary, depending on installation location and materials. There's a big difference between installing through a house door and a brick wall.**

Getting a pet door installed in a house door usually ranges between \$200 and \$350. Wall installations depend on wall material and normally range between \$400 and \$1,600. Wood studs are lower cost than concrete walls.

Other conditions can influence the installation price. Electrical outlets, wiring, plumbing, air ducts, and similar can create extra work that will bump up the price – or make the intended location unsuitable.

When dealing with wall installations, it's a good idea to choose a backup spot, just in case the favorite choice turns out to hide something in the wall that can't be moved.

## Are there chew-proof pet doors?

**There are dog doors guaranteed to be chew proof. These usually have a higher up-front cost, but if you know your dog is prone to chewing, it will save a lot of money in the long run.**

The BiteGuard KennelPlex is constructed to handle extreme climates and withstand the rigorous activities of professionally trained dogs. These doors are used in kennels throughout the world and have a five-year warranty that includes the panels.

If the BiteGuard panels are destroyed by chewing within five years of the purchase, they will be replaced.

The Extra Large PlexiDor has a similar chew protection.

# What's the best pet door for extreme climates?

**Several doors are insulated and work well in extreme climates, but the PlexiDor is the best: it is constructed to withstand both desert heat and frigid temperatures down to -40 F/C.**

The door will still work below -40 F/C, but at such cold temperatures, the panes will get frosty and the weather seal will freeze to the frame.

The reasons the door handles such extreme temperatures are:

## **Materials**

The frame is made from aluminium, and the panels from K9-Composite. The aluminium frames are 3-4 times thicker than all other frames on the market, making them sturdy and preventing them from warping with weather. K9-Composite is a special acrylic alloy similar to airplane windshields with a temperature operating range of -50 F to 150 F (-46 C to 66 C.)

The K9-Composite is created to withstand abuse from both weather and items hitting it at full speed. For instance, dogs running through as fast as they can, or boys throwing a hard ball at the door. (It is great fun.) The service life of these panels is 20 to 30 years.

## **Weather Seal**

The PlexiDor uses a nylon pile weather seal, designed for millions of cycles in cold weather. This weather seal is used in doors for malls and movie theaters.

## **Construction**

All corners are thoroughly fitted together with metal fasteners and clips.

# What would it take to make the PlexiDor panels freeze up?

**High humidity areas can cause the PlexiDor panels to freeze up. Do not mount the door near dryer wall-vents; the moisture can cover the panels, allowing ice to form on the weather seal. If that happens, the panels will be frozen to the frame.**

Also, do not mount the door where it will be misted with water, such as near a sprinkler head.

It is rare that the panels freeze, but if the area is so cold that it happens, there is a fix:

The first thing to do is make sure there's sufficient insulation in the hole where the dog door or cat door is installed. It's also a good idea to add foam weather seal on the back side of the pet door frame, to create a barrier between the pet door frame and the face of the wall or door where it is installed.

If this isn't enough to solve the problem, you can use heat tape. Ask at the hardware store to make sure you buy a product safe for this manner of use. Put the heat tape across the bottom of the dog door frame. If the door still freezes at the top of the frame, put heat tape all the way up the sides and across the top as well.

It would be best to put the heat tape on the backside of the frame, so it is between the dog door and the wall/door surface – that way the dog or cat can't be tempted to play with it.

If the problem stems from high humidity indoors, a dehumidifier can also be helpful in reducing condensation.

Call our customer service at 800-749-9609 with any questions!

# How do I secure my yard?

**How much work you need to do to secure your yard depends on your pets and their personality. Most dogs are perfectly happy going out in a fenced area and going back in without ever getting into trouble.**

Naturally, the area itself should be safe. In this aspect, common sense goes far. Avoid plants and items toxic to your pets, and keep it neat and clean, so there aren't sharp or dangerous objects lying around. If your pet enjoys digging, you might not want to have your favorite plants in the pet's area.

If you have a pool, it's a good idea to make sure your pet doesn't have access to it on their own. Even breeds who are great swimmers can get in and forget how to get back out, and some breeds can only swim with great difficulty. Bulldogs, for example, should never be left by a pool unsupervised. They may be able to splash around and keep themselves afloat for a few minutes, but they can't swim for long.

Next thing to consider is, the fence to your yard must be sufficient to keep your pets in your yard.

Most dogs will go outside, enjoy the sunshine and the grass, and go back in. They don't need a serious fence to stay where they're supposed to.



Some dogs will dig and try to get under the fence. In these cases, you may need a wire fencing laid down against the base of your regular fence, bent in a L-shape. It can be buried, but many just put it on the grass and put some rocks on it to hold it down. With grass growing through it, you barely see it's there.

Some dogs will climb or jump. Make sure your fence is tall enough. If you have a jumper, dense shrubs along the fence line will force the dog to back up and jump longer to get over – which in turn makes the jump more difficult. There are also “rollers” designed to make it impossible to get a grip on the top of the fence – the roll spins. Some dog owners make this themselves from PVC pipe.

Landscaping can also help create a buffer between a “patrolling” dog and the outside world, helping your pet relax.

If your dog is a K9 Houdini, there are enclosed, expanded exercise areas that basically puts a ceiling on the yard.

## Will a pet door solve problems?

**A pet door can solve *some* problems – it will allow your cat or dog access to the yard whenever you have the door unlocked.**

Most install dog doors to not have to worry about potty breaks during long work days, to minimize accidents on the floor, and to give pets an opportunity to run and play when they want to.

Some install cat doors inside the house to give cats access to a specific area without having to keep a door open. Or, to give cats access to an area while keeping dogs out of there.

When it comes to other types of problems, such as chewing on things, a pet door can alleviate some of the underlying boredom through providing access to another environment. But, a dog can be just as bored outdoors as indoors.

# Will a pet door stop my dog from chewing?

**A pet door can help get chewing problems under control, but it depends on why the pet chews.**

Puppies and adult dogs chew for different reasons. A teething puppy may have an itchy or aching mouth.

That's a problem that will grow away, and it can be managed by appropriate chew toys.

An adult dog chewing on things is usually bored.

A dog door can alleviate some of that boredom through offering access to another environment – the yard – with a new set of sounds and smells, but a dog can be just as bored outdoors as indoors.

Thus, the pet door might not solve the problem on its own. Try to also increase play time and add some thinking-type games such as food puzzles to stimulate your dog and get the problems under control.

It is nearly impossible to exercise a dog tired – it is much easier to make their brains tired.

If you know your dog likes chewing, consider investing in a chew-proof door. It is a higher cost up-front, but will save you a lot of money in the long run.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Why can't I just cut a hole in my glass door and install a pet door?**

The glass used in a window or door is tempered – a process that increases its strength but also makes it impossible to cut without shattering.

In order to install a pet door through a window or a glass door, the pane must be replaced. Many pet doors are available for installation on glass. You would need to order a new pane with the right sized hole already cut.

There is also a new PlexiDor Glass Series that comes as a prefabricated glass unit with a factory installed PlexiDor dog door or cat door. There are sizes available to fit most sliding glass door frames.

## **Do you make custom size pet doors?**

Yes, we can provide custom size pet doors for doors, walls, French doors, and patio doors. You can get a custom size pet door ranging from cats to Great Danes.

The custom cat door or dog door will be a flap door, specially tailored to your needs. Call our customer service at 800-749-9606 or e-mail [support@dogdoors.com](mailto:support@dogdoors.com) with your requirements. We will need to know the size of the hole where you want your custom door to fit, and if it's through a door or a wall.

We are available Monday through Friday from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM.



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