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Selecting the Right Dog

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Bringing a dog into the family is a big decision. Many factors need to be analyzed to ensure that the best dog is chosen for your situation. The number one reason dogs are surrendered to animal shelters is that they don't match the needs or the lifestyle of their human families. The purpose of this article is to assist you in selecting a dog, and minimize potential problems.

Questions to Ask

What are your living arrangements?

How much room do you have for a dog? Do you live in an apartment or a house? Do you have a fenced-in yard? All dogs need some type of exercise, but there are considerable variations among breeds. Small breeds tend to adapt better than large breeds to the smaller space available in an apartment. However, some larger breeds are not as active as others and will adapt well to an apartment setting, just as some small breed dogs require a lot of exercise to keep them happy. Having a fenced-in yard will cut down on the time required to walk your dog for bathroom breaks and exercising. Any breed will work in this type of setting, but the more active breeds will require more exercising. Giving a dog sufficient exercise is paramount to having a good relationship with your dog. Many undesirable behaviors, such as hyperactivity and destructive behaviors, can result from insufficient exercise.

Also, you need to be aware of any regulations in your area regarding dog ownership. Some landlords do not allow dogs in their rental units, and some neighborhoods have guidelines regarding the size and the number, or even the breed, of dog that can be owned in that neighborhood.

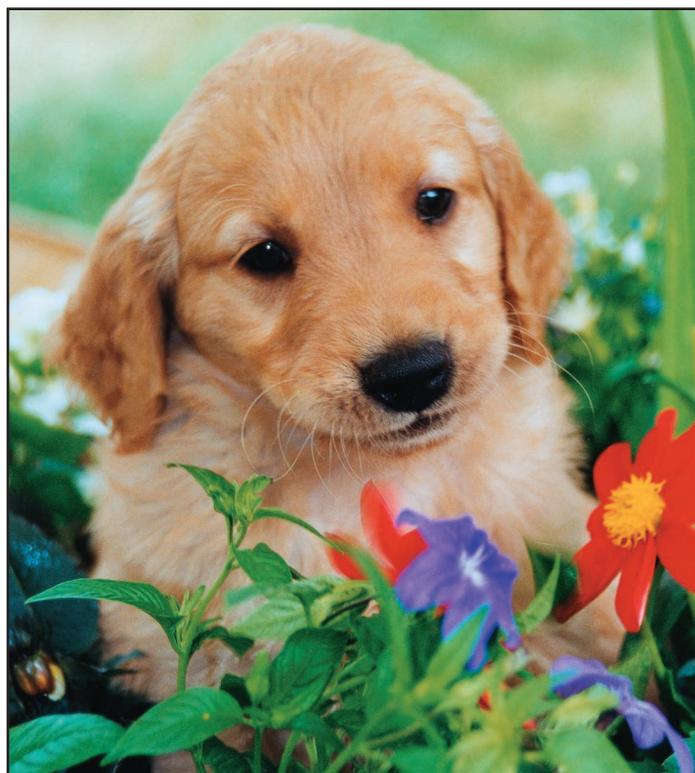
How much time do you have?

Do you work 8, 12, or 14 hours a day? Dogs require time, some more than others. If you work long hours everyday, then a dog may not be the best pet choice. A pet with less upkeep like a cat or fish may be a better fit for your lifestyle. Dogs are similar to humans in that they need to go to the bathroom in the morning, around noon, in the

afternoon, in the evening, and before bed. This is especially true with puppies, which are not physically capable of waiting a long time between bathroom breaks. If you are away from home a lot, you may want to consider an adult dog that is already housebroken instead of a small puppy.

Do you have children or other pets?

Young children may play with the dog roughly without understanding what they are doing, or what the potential consequences may be. Dogs joining a household with small children must be very tolerant of the children's play. Dogs from the herding group have a natural instinct to herd livestock and may try to do so with your family. This instinct includes nipping at the ankles, so these dogs might not be the best choice. Any dog can bite given sufficient provocation, so no dog should be left unsupervised with young children.



Existing pets in the household must be considered when getting a new dog. The temperament of the new dog needs to be compatible with those of the existing pets to make sure no problems will arise with the new addition. Territorial problems should be expected. They usually clear up within a week or so. During this time, it is best to feed the dogs in separate locations, as food is a common cause of conflict.

What is your level of experience?

Have you owned dogs before? As mentioned previously, dogs require time and energy, and should be chosen with this in mind. Every dog needs obedience training, which can be done by you or by a professional. If you have never owned a dog before, an adult dog with some basic obedience training may be your best choice.

What are your finances?

There are a lot of expenses associated with dog ownership. The initial cost will vary depending on the breed and type of dog you select. Purebreds tend to cost more than mixed breed dogs, especially if they are purchased from a breeder or a pet store. However, purebreds from breed rescues can be less expensive. Purebreds are sometimes available through an animal shelter, although they will probably not have registration papers. It is best to be able to see and meet your potential dog's parents. That will give you an idea of its mature size and temperament, and provide valuable information about how the dog has been cared for by the current owner.

There are many other costs associated with dog ownership beyond the initial purchase price. Before you purchase a dog, go to a local pet warehouse. Check the prices of dog food, collars, leashes, toys, food bowls, crates, and any other supplies you think you need for your dog. If you have friends or family members who own dogs, ask them you how much they spend annually. The dog should visit the veterinarian annually for a physical examination and vaccinations. You will need to budget for the cost of potential illness or injury. Pet insurance is an option in some places, and may be something you want to explore.

There are regulatory requirements that include fees you need to pay. In most states, it is required by law to vaccinate your dog for rabies. Your veterinarian can let you know how frequently the vaccine must be administered. You may also be required to license your dog. Your veterinarian can also tell you what the local requirements are and how to get your dog licensed properly.

If you have answered all of the above questions and still think a dog is the right pet for your family, you can find a dog to fit your lifestyle and personality.

Purpose of dog?

The first thing you must determine to select the right dog is what purpose the dog will serve. Do you plan to breed, show, or hunt with the dog? Is the dog needed for service or therapy, or strictly as a companion? Regardless of the purpose, the dog selected should be a healthy representative of the species. If breeding or showing, you need a dog that meets or exceeds the standards for the breed and has all the appropriate documentation of its lineage. Hunting requires a good scent- or sight-hunting dog. Many dogs are good for service or therapy, but they need to have good temperaments, low ability to be distracted, and a willingness to learn.

Long hair vs. short hair?

Long haired breeds require more regular grooming than short haired dogs. Long haired dogs have a lot more hair to shed as well. Extensive grooming can be either time intensive, or expensive, depending on whether you prefer to do the grooming yourself, or if you have the dog groomed professionally.

Size of dog?

Dogs can be generally divided into three size categories based on their weight at maturity. Small breeds are generally up to 20 pounds, medium breeds are from 20-50 pounds, and large dogs are greater than 50 pounds. Smaller dogs generally do not require as much space as larger dogs; however, caution should be taken with small breeds due to their small and fragile bodies. Small dogs can be easily injured by rough play, either with people, or with larger dogs. Large breeds can unintentionally cause harm to small children when playing. Large breeds tend to live anywhere from 8-12 years with 10 being the average. Small breeds can live to be 15 or 16 with an average of 14 years.

Temperament?

Do you want an active or non-active dog? You want a dog's temperament to match that of your lifestyle. If you have children, look for dogs with a low tendency to bite and a high tolerance for handling. If it is a guard dog, you want it to be obedient but still able to effectively guard the territory. Dogs that are overtly aggressive should be avoided always.

Age?

Do you want a puppy, an adult, or a senior dog? Puppies require a lot of attention and training, which may be difficult to accomplish with a busy schedule. A young adult will not need to be let out as often as a puppy, but it will need a lot of exercise and training. Older dogs may be less active, but costs may increase due the higher need for veterinary care as age increases. A popular myth is

that older dogs will not bond to their new owners. This is not true. If you invest the time and effort into developing a good relationship with your dog, bonding will happen, regardless of age.

Gender?

Either gender is fine to choose, but there are differences. Males are generally larger than females within a breed, and they may have a tendency to be more aggressive and dominant. Intact males also are more likely to mark their territory with urine, and they mount more often. If you have a male dog already, the addition of a female dog will cause less fighting and competing than the addition of another male. Un-spayed females go through estrus (heat) twice a year. All dogs bark as a form of communication. It is a breed characteristic and a trait of each individual dog.

Purebred or Mix Breeds?

If you are looking for a companion dog, either a mixed breed or purebred dog can be an excellent companion. If you are interested in breeding dogs, a purebred is required. American Kennel Club (AKC) shows require a purebred dog, but many other show opportunities are available for mix breeds (i.e., agility). Purebred dogs' lineage can be traced back easily and they tend to be more expensive than mixed breed dogs. Their genetics are more predictable in regard to size, temperament, and appearance. Some breeds are predisposed to certain genetic diseases. If you are looking at purebred dogs, it is important to know what genetic diseases the breed you are interested in can have, so you can beware of animals with that disease. Mixed breeds tend to have hybrid vigor and characteristics of the breeds from which they originated. They have fewer genetic diseases, but the prediction of mature size and temperament is more difficult. On average, mixed breed dogs are easier to find and less expensive to buy than purebred dogs.

Breeds by Group and Characteristics

There are many breeds that will fit any and all needs and wants your family may have. Characteristics of the breeds are just generalizations, and mixed breed dogs would be expected to possess characteristics of all breeds contributing to their genetic makeup. Individual dogs within the breeds may not have the typical characteristics, or may display them to differing degrees. The following are different classifications of breeds, characteristics, and examples of the breeds grouped as defined by the AKC. Specific breed information along with pictures can be found on the AKC Web site.

Herding

Examples: Australian Shepherd, Border Collie, Welsh Corgi (Pembroke, Cardigan), Collie, German Shepherd Dog, Old English Sheepdog, and Shetland Sheepdog

Characteristics: The Herding group was broken off from the Working group in 1983. They are intelligent, train easily, and make excellent companions. They can be very protective of their families and their property.

Hound

Examples: Afghan Hound, Basset Hound, Beagle, Coon Hound, Bloodhound, Dachshund (short hair, long hair, wire hair), Foxhound, Greyhound, Irish Wolfhound, and Rhodesian Ridgeback

Characteristics: Hounds are known for their excellent hunting skills; they can either be sight or scent hunters. They are very active and can be very loud barkers and howlers. Hounds are devoted to tasks, can be distracted easily, and may be more sensitive to anesthetics.

Miscellaneous

Examples: Neapolitan Mastiff, Jack Russell Terrier, Beauceron, Black Russian Terrier, Plott, and Redbone Coonhound

Characteristics: The miscellaneous group consists of purebreds that are not necessarily AKC registered. They still can be show dogs, and have a variety of personalities and uses. They are recognized by the AKC as new breeds, but have not yet been categorized into one of the other groups

Non-Sporting

Examples: American Eskimo Dog, Bichon Frise, Boston Terrier, Bulldog (American, English), Chinese Shar-pei, Chow Chow, Dalmation, Keeshound, Lhasa Apso, and Poodle

Characteristics: The most diverse group of fully recognized breeds, the non-sporting group is made of breeds that don't clearly fit in any other group. Breeds come in a variety of sizes, coat colors, and personalities. There are representatives in this group of breeds with a variety of uses (hunting, guarding, lap dogs).

Sporting

Examples: Pointers, Retrievers (Golden, Labrador, Chesapeake Bay), Setters (English, Gordon, Irish), Spaniels (Brittney, Clumber, Cocker, Springer), and Weimaraner

Characteristics: High energy levels, high endurance, very alert, and moderate obedience levels characterize the sporting breeds. These dogs require lots of exercise, and they are not the best dog for apartments, or for people who are not active.

Terrier

Examples: Airedale Terrier, Staffordshire Terrier (Bull, American), Bull Terrier, Fox Terrier, Miniature Schnauzer, Scottish Terrier, Welsh Terrier, and West Highland White Terrier

Characteristics: Terriers are feisty and energetic and tend to have little tolerance of other animals. They were originally bred and used to hunt vermin, so they are very intelligent and independent. Terriers need an active owner who will understand their independent personalities.

Toy

Examples: Chihuahua, Chinese Crested, Maltese, Miniature Pinscher, Papillon, Pekingese, Pomeranian, Pug, Shih Tzu, and Yorkshire Terrier

Characteristics: Toys are good dogs for apartments, city life or people who are looking for lap dogs. They can be easier to maintain because of their smaller size, although some have high grooming needs. Toys should learn basic obedience like all other dogs, failure to do so may result in a pet with a bad attitude.

Working

Examples: Akita, Alaskan Malamutes, Bernese Mountain Dog, Boxer, Mastiff (Bull, French), Doberman Pinscher, Schnauzer (Standard, Giant), Great Dane (Tawny, Brindle, Harlequin), Great Pyrenees, Newfoundland, Rottweiler, St. Bernard, and Siberian Husky

Characteristics: The largest group in number of breeds, working dogs are known for their herding skills, ability to pull sleds, and guard territory. They are quick to learn, intelligent, large, dominant, and strong, have high endurance and are territorial. Good obedience training is a must because of the size and strength of the working breeds.

Choosing the Right Dog Within the Breed

There are many places to purchase a dog. Remember, the initial cost of the dog is only a part of the cost of dog ownership. Reputable breeders may be harder to locate than pet stores. Genetic diseases may be more prevalent, especially if the breeder is not discriminating. Animals at pet stores may not be in the best health due to the stress of transportation of puppies, and the high traffic of people and other dogs. Additionally, some pet stores do not know very much about the background of the dogs that are purchased there. Shelters are an excellent source for a dog. Shelters have a large variety of dogs, both purebreds and mixed breeds, and in addition to getting a good pet, you get the positive feeling of having “rescued” a dog. Be cautious with newspaper ads. The advertised dogs are



usually free or cheap, but the health and genetics of the dog can be variable. Make sure you ask why the person is giving up the dog.

When buying a dog, take your time and look at many facilities and dogs. A good breeder will not be hasty to sell their dogs. They will be most interested in the dog’s well-being and will want to place the dog in the best home possible. The best breeders will even interview you to make sure you are prepared for a dog and understand the responsibility. Many breeders will follow up after the purchase to check on the new member of your family. Puppies should not be sold earlier than six weeks, so do not buy one from a breeder if offered. The breeder should have good records of the lineage, genetic tests, vaccinations, and health history of both parents. If the parents are available, the breeder will let you see them along with their records. In most cases, the mother, and information on the father, will be present. A good facility will have a separate area for puppies, which is clean and sanitized. The puppies should be provided socialization opportunities with the breeder and other animals. When handling the puppies, look for any abnormal appearance such as unhealthy eyes, ears, or limbs.

When selecting a dog, you want to observe its behavior, and avoid extremes. Desirable characteristics include curiosity, playfulness, and confidence. Undesirable characteristics include dominance, bullying, apathy, excessive barking, biting, and submissive urinating.

Two people should bring the puppy home, one to hold the puppy in the car and the other to drive. If the new dog is an adult dog, it should be confined in a crate when it is

transported. Try to have the next few days free to let the new dog adapt to the family and environment. Start calling the dog by its appointed name. Try not to leave it alone for more than 30 minutes as it adjusts to its new life.

When choosing the puppy, several tests need to be done to make sure the best puppy of the litter is picked. When choosing a dominant breed (i.e., territorial, aggressive, controlling), ideal test outcomes should be a little toward the submissive (i.e., shy, cautious, crouch with tail between legs). This is the opposite for submissive breeds.

1. Hold the dog with the feet a few inches off the floor.
 - a. Normal (N): struggle a little and then settle down
 - b. Dominant (D): continue struggling, may bite and howl
 - c. Submissive (S): urinate or dangle
2. Hold the puppy on its back in your lap and stroke the belly while talking softly.
 - a. N: Struggle then settle down
 - b. D: Struggle, bite, and howl
 - c. S: Urinate, panic, totally succumb
3. Toss a ball.
 - a. N: Chase, play, bring it back, and let you take it away
 - b. D: Chase the ball, take it to a corner, growl when you try to take it away
 - c. S: Not react at all, or afraid
4. Crouch and call to it.
 - a. N: It will come over happily, confidently, and playfully
 - b. D: It will charge, jump, or ignore
 - c. S: It will hide, come cautiously, expose belly, urinate when touched
5. Test with people. When toys or other sounds are present you want the puppy to come to you even with distractions.
6. Test confidence. You want to do this test as long as the puppy is not 8-12 weeks of age because this is considered their fear period. For this test, throw an object that makes noise. A good reaction is to be cautious, then curious. A bad reaction would be if the dog howls, bolts in fear, urinates or defecates. These dogs will tend to be fear aggressive and fearful when in unknown situations.

Preparing the House

Dogs, especially puppies and adolescent dogs, love to

chew. This is an instinctive behavior and impossible to eliminate, so make sure anything that you do not want chewed is put away. Buy toys and bones to minimize chewing of your personal items. You will also need a leash, collar, bowls, food, bones, toys, beds, and grooming supplies to prepare for the arrival of a dog. You should set up an appointment with your veterinarian before taking the new dog home especially if you have other pets.

Summary

As demonstrated in this paper, there is a lot to consider, and many options when adding a dog to your family. Careful thought and selection is well worth the effort when you bring home a dog that fits the purpose you intended, and you and the dog develop a strong and effective relationship.

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Checklists

The following checklists can be used to help you

select a dog, and prepare your home for the new dog.

Place of Purchase. Rate each dog visited on a scale of 1-5.

- Cleanliness of facility _____
- Dogs and puppies well socialized? _____
- Healthy dogs and puppies? _____
- Lineage _____
- Papers _____
- Parents and/or siblings seen _____
- Breeder attitude _____

Personality Tests

- 1. Dog held with feet off floor: N D S
- 2. Dog on back while stroking belly: N D S
- 3. Toss a ball: N D S
- 4. Crouch and call dog: N D S
- 5. Test with people: N D S
- 6. Test confidence: N D S

Prepare Home

- Remove chewables _____
- Food and Treats _____
- Toys and Bones _____
- Grooming supplies _____

Bowls and Bedding _____

- Leash/Collar/ID tags _____
- Veterinarian appt. _____

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