

Choosing the Perfect Dog

Basic Canine Education



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

PETCO encourages you to adopt your new dog from a shelter or another reputable animal welfare organization. Purebred puppies and dogs can often be found in shelters. Also, check with your local animal shelter or Petfinder.com to find the names and numbers of local rescue groups dedicated to your desired breed. Remember, when you adopt an animal, you save two lives – the life of the animal you adopted and the life of the animal you just made room for in the shelter. If you would rather purchase a dog, please be sure to use a reputable breeder.

The decision to add a dog to your family is exciting and sometimes overwhelming. What type of dog is best for your family and current situation? Asking yourself the right questions and researching your chosen breed can go a long way towards helping you and your family find the perfect canine companion.

Dogs come in a wide range of sizes, temperaments, colors, coat types and exercise requirements. Before making a decision on the right breed for your family, ask yourself some honest questions.

1) What exactly does your family expect from this dog?

Do the kids want someone to roughhouse with? Does dad want someone to take hunting? Does mom want someone to cuddle? A dog is a family pet, and everyone in the family needs to understand what your dog can and cannot do. Roughhousing with some breeds can lead to aggression, unless the roughhousing is in a controlled environment and with rules for your dog's behavior. However, rough play can injure small dogs if care is not taken. Some dogs prefer to sit near their favorite human, instead of cuddling with them. And, of course, not all breeds are suited to hunting or even outdoor life. Be certain everyone is clear on what they want from the family dog, and try to choose your breed accordingly.

2) How much time do you have to spend with a dog?

Most dogs do best when allowed to spend as much time as possible with their human family. Some breeds are content to simply sit or lie next to you, while others may need a job to keep them out of trouble and their mind busy. If your family is away from home most of the time, perhaps a dog is not the right companion for you right now as they do require a lot of human interaction.

3) How much grooming are you prepared to do or pay a professional to do?

Each coat type requires its own grooming routine. The short, flat coat of the Doberman requires much less time and energy than the long, beautiful tresses of the Afghan hound. As a rule, short-haired coats tend to be "wash and wear," longer hair will need regular brushing and may need clipping or an occasional shaving to look its best and to keep the dog's skin healthy. Some breeds require monthly grooming. Even hairless varieties need specific skin care, they need to be bathed more often, require regular application of a lanolin-free skin cream and need sun block when they go outdoors. Carefully research your preferred breed's grooming needs. Don't forget dental care and toenail clipping.

4) How much hair are you willing to put up with in your house?

All dogs shed. Some dogs, however, shed much less noticeably than others. Some breeds shed constantly, while others shed seasonally in the spring. Short hair, while less visible, may actually be more difficult to clean up than clumps of longer hair.

5) How big is your yard and how important are your gardens?

A toy or sedentary breed may get all the exercise it needs following you around the house. More active dogs need either a large yard or access to frequent walks and romps in the park. If you keep an award-winning garden, you might not want to choose a breed known for digging.

6) How physically active are you?

Match your dog's exercise needs with your own activity level. Short-legged, slow breeds will frustrate the active jogger, and quick, energetic breeds may exhaust the physically frail or inactive.

7) How old are your children?

Not all dogs love the quick movements and shrill voices of young children. Some smaller or more delicate breeds may even be injured by sudden toddler hugs. And some young children could be knocked down or overwhelmed by very large or unruly dogs.

Choosing the Perfect Dog

Choosing your Breed



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8) Are you a strict disciplinarian, or a pushover?

Some breeds are more difficult to train than others. No matter the breed, all dogs need consistent training but some need more than others. Match the breed's temperament and training needs to your level of patience and available time for training.

9) Will this be your first dog?

Some breeds make wonderful first pets. Others benefit more from owners with dog experience. First time dog owners might be best served by adopting a young adult dog from a knowledgeable shelter rather than purchasing a puppy.

Puppy or Adult Dog?

There is very little as cute and appealing as a puppy. Getting a puppy allows you to be in on the training at the very earliest of stages, leaving little unknown. But puppies also go through many learning stages, and must be trained in all aspects of family life, including manners, possessions, and bathroom locations. In short, puppies are a lot of work. Plus, there is no way to look at a darling little puppy and know for certain the adult temperament.

All puppies should stay with their mom and littermates for at least 8 weeks.

Adult dogs, on the other hand, have worked through all of their puppy issues. Depending on what sort of early life they had, they will come relatively trained, with personality and habits already established. This can be a good thing or a training challenge.

Purebred or Mixed Breed?

Purebred puppies have years of careful breeding behind them to develop consistent looks, temperament, and size. Looking at that tiny bundle of fluff, you have a good idea of what it will grow into. Reputable breeders can give you a good idea of what genetic issues you should watch for in their breed, and should guarantee their puppies against most of the common ones. Purebred dogs can be expensive, and, depending on the breed, difficult to find. Registration papers are not a guarantee of quality. Try to see the puppy's mother and father to get a good idea of temperament and eventual size.

Mixed breed puppies can be a wonderful combination of all of the best traits of the various breeds represented. But it can be difficult to guess the eventual size and temperament of the grown dog. Mixed breeds tend to be less expensive than purebreds, and can be found at almost any shelter or rescue agency. First time dog owners might do best adopting a young adult mix breed from a shelter that can give them good information on the dog's current and expected temperament.

Research Your Favorite Breeds

Attend dog shows and performance events to get the best idea of all the breeds available to you. Several large dog shows, such as the Westminster Kennel Show, are now being televised. This is a great place to start. Talk to and visit breeders, veterinarians, and owners of breeds you are interested in. Read as many books as you can find on your chosen breeds, so that you can get a variety of opinions. Some great internet resources include:

PETCO: www.petco.com

The American Kennel Club: www.akc.org

The United Kennel Club: www.ukcdogs.com

Suggested Reading

The Complete Book of Dogs published by the American Kennel Club

The Complete Dog Book for Kids published by the American Kennel Club

The Right Dog for You by Daniel F. Tortora, PHD

Mini-Atlas of Dog Breeds by DePrisco & Johnson

The Adoption Option by Eliza Rubenstein & Shari Kalina

The Perfect Match by Chris Walkowicz

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.