

## The Best Surprise Is No Surprise

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We are told that the Obamas have narrowed down their selection of a dog to two possibilities: a Portuguese Water Dog and a labradoodle.

Putting aside for the moment the fact that the labradoodle is not a breed at all but a cross between the Labrador Retriever and the Poodle, it's important to emphasize that one of the major advantages of a purebred dog is its predictability in size, coat, color, grooming requirements, and temperament. You may not have a duck pond in your backyard, for instance, but a Golden Retriever is genetically programmed to retrieve birds efficiently thanks to its soft mouth and water-resistant coat. Therefore your pet Golden will demonstrate an interest in both birds (even city pigeons and sparrows) and water (including rain puddles and wading pools). In this way, it is doing what its ancestors were historically bred to do.

The Portuguese Water Dog is an active, intelligent breed that many allergy-sufferers have fared well with. He is a medium-sized dog with a wavy or curly coat that comes in specific colors: black, brown, or a combination of these with white. Given that predictability, the Obama girls should be able to successfully manage their respiratory issues living with a PWD in the family.

By comparison, many owners of labradoodles – and indeed many breeders of them – have admitted that the dogs are not all low-shedding. Think about it. How do you take a non-shedding breed (the Poodle), cross it with a breed that sheds profusely (the Labrador), and expect the resulting puppies to be endowed with only the non-shedding genes? Mother Nature simply doesn't work that way.

Conscientious breeders of purebreds are also committed to producing the healthiest puppies possible. Dogs that are intended to be bred from are screened for all potential health problems that might afflict the breed, and those that come up short do not make it into the breeding pool. The Portuguese Water Dog Club of America is among the most active parent clubs in the country when it comes to insisting that breeding stock is screened for hereditary issues. A breeder is not permitted to advertise his dog or a forthcoming litter in the club magazine without first providing documentation that the animals in question have passed all their health tests.

Those who cross different breeds together for fun and profit seldom have the knowledge and experience to know about genetic screening. The parents of a proposed litter may each have various genetic problems and their puppies may inherit every undesirable recessive gene in the book, in addition to an unruly coat that may be a real chore to keep groomed ... and that may shed to boot!

While the Portuguese Water Dog breed standard specifies that males will stand from 20 to 23 inches at the shoulder and weigh 42 to 60 pounds, while females will stand 17 to 21 inches at the shoulder and weigh 35 to 50 pounds, labradoodles can pop up in any size – large, medium or small – depending upon the size of their Poodle parent, a parent you are not likely to meet at a shelter, where the Obamas hope to find their dog.

Creativity is a wonderful quality in a dog owner. If you're planning to purchase a dog, show your originality by choosing a unique name, a cool bed, or great toys. But choose the dog by taking advantage of generations of responsible, planned breeding so he or she turns out just the way you had hoped and read about in the dog books. The best surprise is no surprise at all.

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