

New Dog Checklist

By Joan Hustace Walker

The shopping list for a new puppy can be long and expensive: food, grooming tools, crates, bedding, toys, and miscellaneous accessories, which, when added to the expense of veterinary preventive care, can easily top \$1,000. But don't panic! Use this checklist to make sure you shop wisely and save money while still having the necessary equipment and supplies on hand.

Nutrition

Your puppy is what he eats and it's up to you to make sure he receives the nutrition he needs. Read the labels. For your puppy's best health and development, choose a puppy food that has been proven through feeding trials to meet the nutritional guidelines set by the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). This information will be provided on the food's packaging. Watch portion sizes. Quality foods packed with highly digestible nutrients tend to require smaller portions than less digestible foods and in the long run are quite comparable in price; however, you should expect to pay anywhere from 24 cents a day for a small breed puppy to \$1.30 a day or more for a large breed puppy.

Preventive Veterinary Care

Part of your puppy's routine care will include keeping parasites such as fleas, ticks, and worms at bay. Products are available through your veterinarian and as over-the-counter treatments. Safety first. "Prescription products are very effective and have undergone a significant amount of testing [for efficacy] as well as for safety," says Steve Marks, BVSc, MS, MRCVS, Diplomate-American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, clinical associate professor, Critical Care and Internal Medicine at North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine at Raleigh, N.C. Prices range between \$10 to \$14 a month, dosage is by weight, and products can be given to puppies as young as 6 to 8 weeks old. Worth checking into. Over-the-counter medications for fleas, ticks, or worms are available; however, because these products haven't necessarily received the same stringent safety and efficacy testing, Marks warns that OTCs can be less effective than prescription medications while still having [serious] side effects. The bottom line: Consult with your veterinarian before using.

Collars and Leashes

Puppies grow an incredible amount in their first year, let alone their first six months. Before purchasing a one-of-a-kind designer collar (that will be outgrown and/or chewed) and matching leash, consider these more economical products as first choices. Buckle up. A buckle collar made of nylon or cotton webbing (\$7 to \$15) is safe, can be cleaned, and wears well, says animal behavior specialist Kari Bastyr, MS, owner of Wag&Train dog training (www.wagandtrain.com) in Denver. Fit the collar so that at the tightest hole you can fit two fingers between the collar and your pup's neck so he will have room to grow. Keep it light. Nylon or cotton webbing leashes are also economical choices. To keep your pup comfortable, choose a leash that is light and thin and between four and six feet long (\$10 to \$15).

Identification

Without some form of identification, a lost or stolen puppy has virtually no chance of being recovered. IDs range in price from truly budget to more expensive options. Non-permanent IDs. ID tags (\$4 to \$10) are inexpensive and attach to the collar. Permanent IDs. One option is a tattoo (\$15, not including anesthesia; often performed during spay/neuter); another is microchipping (\$50; does not require anesthesia). Cutting edge IDs. You can purchase a Global Positioning System (GPS) location device for dogs, which fastens securely to the collar, designed by GlobalPetFinder (\$350 per unit, \$35 activation fee, \$18 to \$20 per month subscription fee).

Toys, Toys, and More Toys

Toys aren't just for playing - they're also for dental hygiene, teething aids, comfort, physical activity, and mental stimulation. You can go wild with dog toys - but if you've got a limited supply of cash, your money is best spent with products that are safe and durable. Entertainment value. One of the newest trends in toys is the interactive toy, designed to involve the puppy in play. For example, toys that make unusual sounds when moved, treat-dispensing toys, and automated systems that randomly release toys throughout the day. Know your chewer. Some puppies can be left safely to play with strong, durable toys; others will find a way to shred and choke on just about anything you might give them. Be particularly aware of the size of the toy; your puppy can swallow balls larger than his jaws. Also be aware of the materials it is made from - latex tears, stuffing can be swallowed, and bones can splinter). Always supervise your pup's chewing.

Crates, Gates, and Bedding

Crates and gates are an essential part of housetraining and though they can add up to more than a couple hundred dollars, being able to partition your home and provide a safe training environment for your puppy could be priceless. The Perfect Crate. "The idea is to have the crate small enough that the puppy can't potty in one corner and sit in the other," Bastyr says. Because a pup grows so much in size his first year, consider buying a crate that lets you insert a partition, making the crate smaller for the puppy. The most durable crates are made of hard plastic or wire (\$25 to \$120). Gated community. Baby or dog gates (\$25 to \$80) let you keep your puppy in sight and confined to a specific area. They come in varying heights and widths, are offered in wood, plastic and metal styles, and can be wall-mounted or temporary. To save money, check yard sales and thrift shops for used gates. Bedding on a budget. "No one's made an indestructible puppy bed," laughs Bastyr, who recommends not spending much money on a young pup's bed. "Choose the \$15 bed over the \$150 one, or just use a clean blanket," she says.

Grooming supplies

"The most important thing with puppies is that they are touched so they are ready to be groomed, have their teeth brushed and their toenails clipped when they are older," Bastyr says. What you'll need. To get your pup used to grooming, purchase a soft bristle or pin brush (\$4 to \$5), a toenail clipper (\$6 to \$15), and a finger (tooth) brush (\$8 for the brush; \$9 for dog toothpaste).

Need vs. want

It's easy to be overwhelmed by a puppy's material needs. Fortunately, most of these purchases are one time expenses, especially if you keep non-durable items out of reach of your puppy's inquisitive mouth.

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