

Finding the Right Dog Breed

How much a dog sheds may be an issue in choosing the right companion.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. My fiancé and I are hoping to get a dog in the next few months and we would love a breed that does not shed a lot. We can handle some shedding, but nothing too crazy. We are interested in a Shar-Pei, Boxer, and Boston Terrier. What would you recommend?

A. The Boxer and Boston Terrier are smooth-haired breeds. All they need is a good rubdown with a rubber curry brush about once a week to remove loose hair and add healthy sheen to their coats. Shedding is not an issue with these two wash-and-wear breeds.

The wrinkly Shar-Pei breed has three coat varieties: the horse coat, brush coat, and bear coat. The rare bear coat features longer hair and is seen as a throwback to a probable breed ancestor, the Chow-Chow. The horse coat is very short, the brush coat somewhat longer, but both feel prickly to the touch. Some people, including a couple of groomers in my shop, experience an allergic reaction to the Shar-Pei coat. The brush-coated variety sheds minimally year-round while the smoother horse coat molts about twice a year, and requires more frequent brushing.

Due to heredity and their abundant wrinkles, these dogs often have skin problems. They need weekly brushing with a gentle slicker. Some benefit from a soothing oatmeal or tea tree oil shampoo but after they are bathed, carefully drying their wrinkles will help prevent skin irritation caused by moisture. Bred as fighting dogs in their native China, today's Shar Peis can get along well with other dogs and make enjoyable pets if their owners take a firm leadership role. Originating in Germany, the Boxer's ancestors were probably bull-baiting bulldogs but over the years, these members of the AKC's Working Group have been used as police dogs, guides, and guards. Intelligent, athletic, and devoted to their owners, Boxers have entertaining personalities but may be too exuberant for sedentary types or apartment dwellers.

Also bred down from pit-fighting bulldogs, Boston Terriers today are dapper little characters that get along well with everyone and fit easily into any family or living space. One of a few American-made breeds, they require less exercise than the larger Shar-Peis or Boxers. None of these breeds enjoy being cold or wet so they need the protection of a coat or jacket in the winter. Good luck in your search for the perfect companion!

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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