

Choosing the Right Puppy

Take some time to research and learn which dog breed is right for you.

Maybe you grew up with Beagles under your kitchen table. Or, your then-girlfriend-now-wife had a thing for Snoopy's silly impersonations during your courtship. Whatever your history with the breed, you've fallen hard and are planning a trip to the country to pick out a pup. But before you back out of the driveway—and lay down a credit card—make sure you're choosing the right kind of pooch for your family.

The truth is, it isn't easy finding the right puppy. Many people are wooed by the look of a certain breed or its loopy, high-energy personality. Then, they sour on the animal when they get home and realize the grooming or exercise routine required is more than they envisioned. Maybe the pet grows too big for the apartment. Or instead of barking, it bays—every single time someone pulls into the neighborhood. It ends up that many animals are returned to breeders—or are dumped at shelters in desperation—just because the adopting family initially let their hearts run roughshod over their heads.

Puppies and dogs are the most time-consuming of all house pets and, some say, require about as much attention as a child. Moreover, your commitment will last a decade—or longer. Before you make your final decision to adopt, talk with all members of your family and consider:

Do you have the energy and time to commit to a puppy? Know that you'll have to housebreak him—a tedious job—then walk and play with him religiously.

Do you have enough space for a full-grown dog? If your home is on the small side, are there dog parks or runs nearby so that your pet can get rigorous exercise?

Do you have other animals that would respond well to another pet?

Do you have enough money to cover veterinarian bills, pet supplies and boarding costs if you go on Holiday?

Does anyone in your family have allergies to dogs? If so, would their doctor sanction getting one of the new breeds that sheds less?

Do neighborhood bylaws restrict you from owning a dog?

Conduct Research Before You Buy

Once you've made the decision to adopt, begin researching the different types of dogs and look for a lifestyle match. With more than 300 breeds sanctioned by the American Kennel Club—and hundreds of affable hybrids called mutts looking for homes—the options are endless. Small and medium breeds work well if you live in the city while some of the larger breeds are well suited to small children, etc. Certainly the Web and your local library will have much information to offer, but also try the following resources:

Attend a local dog show and talk with breeders and judges;

Check with friends who have lifestyles similar to yours and ask about their experiences;

Visit pet stores and breed rescue groups, both of which often have forums for playing with puppies;

Always spend time with the puppy you intend to take home before you commit to make sure it has a personality that will blend well with the people in your family.

Preparing for the Homecoming

Once you've selected your pup, you'll want to be ready for his arrival. Before you run out to the dog bakery and order personalized biscuits, however, you'll also want to:

Pet-proof your home, moving electrical cords, household products and plants out of the puppy's reach;

Discern and discuss with your family puppy rules. Figure out who will take care of his meals, walks and toys. Develop a strategy for discipline and housebreaking;

Find a veterinarian and make arrangements for vaccinations as well as neutering as soon as the pet is old enough; research foods appropriate to the animal's age, size and health;

Enroll in obedience classes;

Purchase a kennel, toys, a collar and leash;

Select a name.



Pet ownership is a hugely rewarding endeavor, and we're sure you'll agree it's worth the investment. After all, where would Charlie Brown be without his Beagle?