

## How to Select a Puppy That Is Right for You

### How to pick a puppy that is compatible with your home and family.

*Rose Boccio*

"Here, doggies. Come on, doggies." Two-year-old Kayla invites her grandma's two Bulldogs into her little backyard playhouse. They follow her, eager to play.

The dogs' tough-guy looks belie their gentle behavior and affection. Shena, a 9-month-old English Bulldog, and Venom, a 1½-year-old American Bulldog, enjoy playtime as much as Kayla does.

"That's how I know I picked the right dogs," said Grandma Judy Koehler of R.I.

After years of owning larger dogs -- a St. Bernard and a Rottweiler - Koehler sought a smaller breed that would get along well with her grandchildren, who live down the road. Her choice of Bulldogs was no accident. Koehler did her homework -- exactly what the experts recommend.

"The decision to purchase a certain breed should be made carefully," said American Kennel Club spokeswoman Valerie Geiss. "It shouldn't be impulsive. You are making a commitment for this dog's lifetime, possibly for 10 to 15 years."

Don't be taken in by how cute the puppies are. Find out the positive and negative traits common to a breed and find one that fits well into your family's personality, lifestyle and environment. Koehler chose her dogs after completing three important steps.

Narrow the choices. Decide what's important to you -- the dog's size, hair length and grooming time, trainability, gentleness with children, effectiveness as a watchdog, active or laid-back personality. Then read books and magazines and websites to find a breed that seems to be a good match.

Koehler was leaning toward Bulldogs after getting to know a friend's. But many people who are dog shopping do less research than they would for a car purchase, said Tina Barber of N.Y., president of the Shiloh-Shepherd Dog Club. "As a breeder, I want to know that the buyer is prepared to take care of the dog."

Responsible breeders screen buyers to make sure the match is appropriate, Geiss said. Robbie Buchanan, a Bulldog breeder in Calif., dissuaded a liquor store owner from buying a Bulldog. "He said he needed a good guard dog," Buchanan said. "I told him, 'You're barking up the wrong tree. These dogs are very sweet.'"