

How to Select a Puppy That's Right for You

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

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Also consider adopting a dog from your neighborhood shelter or a breed rescue service (they can be found via the Internet or through local breed or kennel clubs). The low estimate of the number of dogs left at shelters each year starts at 4 million. Most dogs are there because their owners didn't have time for them.

Now you've passed many hurdles and still haven't looked at any puppies. It's time for the fun but hard part: looking at puppies while resisting the urge to take them all home.

Try to approach this part with a little science and objectivity. First step: Observe the litter from afar. How do the dogs interact with one another? Is one more assertive than others? Are any hiding in the shadows? Some breeders recommend that if you are looking at a strong, assertive breed, you might want to pick a dog that's less than center on the assertion scale. By the same token, if you select a more timid breed, like a Greyhound, consider one of the more outgoing puppies.

Do you want male or female? Males tend to be larger and more dominant, while females are usually smaller and more docile. You will be able to tell whether they reflect these gender traits by watching them.

Next, interact with the puppies. Extend your hand. Do they shy away or and bite it gently? The latter reaction is the sign of a well-adjusted puppy.

Physically examine each pup. Run your hand through its fur and over the skin, searching for lesions or bald spots. Look for black spots that smear red when wet - an indication of fleas. Check for discharge from eyes and nose. Make sure feet are dry between the pads and not red and infected. Check bellies and teeth to test for health and disposition. Roll a puppy over and check for bloating. If the tummy is extended, the dog could have parasites. Watch the dog's reaction. If a puppy snaps or balks, it may feel it is the alpha or No. 1 dog in the group - not you.

Check teeth and gums. See whether the dog resists aggressively or rolls over submissively. An even-keeled dog might lick you but will settle down eventually, allowing you to look. Puppy gums should be light pink, not red or pale.

Symmes also recommended throwing a ball or other small object among the dogs. Do they shy away from it, snap at it or sniff at it curiously? Clap and call the dog, and gauge its reaction. A normal puppy will come to you; a dominant dog may charge or ignore you; a submissive puppy might run away.

Breeders conduct temperament and intelligence tests on their dogs. Ask them to demonstrate a few involving social interaction and confidence.