

The More, the Merrier?

Get tips to safely combine dogs and pets of other species.

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Every breed of dog was developed to perform a job, many of which involve chasing, catching, and/or killing other animals. No wonder animal-loving households sometimes find themselves immersed in small tragedies as incompatible animals meet.

It is possible to overcome breed tendencies that put companion animals at risk. Plus, exceptions exist within every breed. Border Collies that aren't interested in sheep or Golden Retrievers that let parakeets sit on their heads. It is easier and safer, however, to avoid breed choices that don't offer such challenges. If you own a non-canine pet and are thinking of getting a dog, here's a list to help you avoid the most glaring mis-matches:

Caged birds: Think twice about retrievers, setters, and spaniels, all bred to hunt birds. They can be extremely birdy - obsessed with the presence of any bird. Be cautious of terriers, which were bred to kill rodents - but any small animal will do as prey. Some working breeds, such as Huskies and shepherds, can also be very prey-oriented.

Rabbits: You may want to steer away from the scent hounds - Beagles, Bassets, Foxhounds, and others bred to follow small game. Some sight hounds - notably Greyhounds - have also been bred to chase and kill rabbits. Again, be cautious of terriers, and consider the prey drive of some working breeds.

Rats, reptiles and other pocket pets: Terriers can be extremely persistent about going after rodents - the very type of animal they were bred to exterminate. Some herding, sporting, and working breeds might have a natural antipathy toward snakes.

Cats: Be cautious, again, of terriers. A cat's tendency to fight back, successful in intimidating softer dogs, often arouses a terrier even more. Many working breeds have a prey drive, and Greyhounds will also sometimes chase and kill cats.

Livestock: If you want to try herding, get a Border Collie, Australian Shepherd, or the like. But if you want to be able to work around your hooved companions in peace, leave the herding breeds out of the picture. They aren't likely to actually kill livestock, but they are workaholics with an obsessive need to herd, and will run circles around you while you play with your sheep or horses.

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