

CHOOSING THE "RIGHT" MATE (Canine, of course!)

Recommended reading:

The Right Dog For You by Daniel F. Tortora, available through most bookstores, including U of W bookstore (206-646-3300)

Reference: The American Kennel Club, 51 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010 (212) 696-8200, www.akc.org. The AKC will provide information on national breed clubs, who in turn can put you in touch with local breed clubs and breeders.

Responsibilities of Dog Ownership:

1) Time for housebreaking, training, exercise and companionship; 2) Money for initial purchase, puppy + annual vaccinations + wormings, routine + emergency veterinary care, spaying/neutering, grooming, training classes, food, and supplies such as kennel, leashes, toys, combs, brushes etc.; 3) Proper indoor and outdoor facilities, including fenced yard or kennel run; 4) Legal implications; 5) Insurance implications.

Match the Dog's Personality and Exercise Requirements to Your Lifestyle:

1) Naturally assertive owners can handle more dominant breeds of dogs, whereas naturally passive people should avoid dominant dogs; 2) Active households with lots of visitors should select dogs that are comfortable with commotion and avoid the more solitary dogs; 3) Unless the owners desire a "challenge," they should select a breed that has a high natural desire to obey and please humans; 4) Low-energy owners should choose a dog requiring little exercise as many breeds of dogs require a great deal of exercise in order to prevent behavior problems; 5) Prospective owners should realistically evaluate their tolerance to shedding and grooming requirements; 6) People who spend very little time at home should think twice about getting a dog; 7) Individuals with limited time and patience for housebreaking might do better with an older puppy or adult dog; 8) Never get a dog unless the entire family is willing to share the responsibilities.

Children in the Household?:

1) For easiest transition, and fewest relationship problems, wait until the child is at least 7 or 8 before purchasing a dog; 2) Include the child in research and selection process on a limited basis; 3) Give the child limited responsibilities for care of the dog -- entire family must be willing to participate; 4) Never get a dog "just for the kids" as it never works out that way; 5) Select a dog that does well with children (toy breeds and smaller dogs are not good choices for kids).

Male vs. Female Dog/Puppy vs. Adult Dog:

1) Spaying/neutering will prevent male dog territoriality and female dog heat cycles; 2) Altering tends to neutralize the difference between male and female dogs, thereby making both suitable pets; 3) Spaying/neutering helps prevent cancer as well as many behavior problems, yet it does not result in negative side effects (does not make dogs fat, lazy, less protective, etc.); 4) Never purchase a puppy before 7 weeks of age, in fact the longer it stays with its mother and littermates, the fewer behavior problems the puppy will have; 5) Younger puppies require more time and attention -- housebreaking, manners, etc.; 6) Older puppies and adult dogs may have behavior problems -- get all the facts; 7) Older dogs may take more time to adjust to their new family -- so be patient.

Teaching your family. Training your dog.

Classes, private lessons & problem solving for puppy manners, home obedience, competition obedience, off-leash control, conformation handling, agility, flyball, tricks & games, therapy work, canine good citizen & more! All breeds. All ages. Mixed breeds & rescue dogs welcome.

Select a Reputable Breeder Who Guarantees His/Her Dogs:

Note: These are generalizations and there are exceptions to every rule (rarely): 1) Avoid big breeders who produce many litters a year (puppy mill); 2) Avoid individuals who own both parents (backyard puppy mill); 3) Avoid pet stores; 4) Select a small, home-based breeder who only has 1-2 litters a year (maximum), who is active in conformation as well as obedience or hunting/field trialing/herding/tracking/etc. Ask for references. Pedigree should contain lots of champions and performance titles. Dogs should be guaranteed against major health defects. The breeder should interrogate you regarding your suitability to own one of his/her puppies and should tell you pros & cons of this particular breed. The breeder should also provide a written contract and give you 24-48 hours to have the dog checked by your veterinarian -- the dog may be returned within this time period for any reason and money refunded. Make certain you understand the difference between "finishable -- championship highly likely" vs. "show potential -- the dog has no disqualifying faults but probably would not finish a championship" vs. "pet quality -- dog has faults which preclude a championship" in the event you want to show your dog. "Faults" are not defects that impact a dog's ability to become a wonderful pet. "Faults" typically include minor defects in structure (tailset, earset, shoulder layback, etc.) or looks (coat texture, color, pigmentation, etc.). Have the breeder identify each puppy's faults as they relate to the breed standard (if the breeder says there are none, beware -- no dog is perfect!).

Health Concerns:

During your research, determine your breed's particular health concerns, e.g. hip dysplasia, heart problems, eye problems, spinal problems, etc. As you interview breeders, ask what they are doing to minimize these problems and what guarantees they provide against major health defects.

About Mixed Breed Dogs:

Mixed breeds are not healthier than purebred dog (myth). There can be more "surprises" with mixed breeds of unknown parentage (size, coat, temperament, health problems, etc.).

Evaluating an Individual Puppy or Dog:

Note: Again, these are generalizations that are intended to help the average dog owner find the "best" dog for his/her lifestyle. 1) Avoid dogs that are extremely shy, as this fear often results in fear aggression; 2) Avoid dogs that are described as "alpha" or "pack leaders" as these dogs are typically too dominant for the average household; 3) Avoid dogs who have not been properly socialized -- again this can result in major behavior problems; 4) Select a dog who is outgoing, friendly and seems comfortable around you after a short period of time; 5) Visit the dog 2 or 3 times before taking it home as each visit will enlighten you; 6) Watch the dog interact with its littermates and/or other dogs -- compare that behavior with the dog's behavior with it's alone with humans.

Some of the Wrong Reasons to Get a Dog:

1) For the children; 2) To give as a gift; 3) To raise puppies and make money; 4) Just for protection; 5) Because you feel sorry for it; 6) On impulse! On the other hand, the benefits of dog ownership include: a) improved owner health -- lower blood pressure readings, slower pulse rates, etc.; b) Companionship; c) Devotion; d) Unconditional love; e) Easier to live with than a lot of people!

Obedience Training & Household Manners:

Housebreaking and household manners should begin the moment the new puppy walks through the door. Use an airline kennel to help with housebreaking and prevention of behavior problems. Enroll in a Puppy Manners or Novice I obedience class as soon as possible to help ensure the dog learns the right way. Encourage all family members to participate with the care and training of the dog.

Still Undecided?:

Take a few typical days from your life and imagine them with a dog. If you're prepared to adjust your schedule and lifestyle to accommodate a canine companion, then welcome to "life in the dog house!" If not now, then maybe in a few years!