

Selecting the Right Dog for Your Lifestyle



Selecting a new pet can be a very emotional event. Those puppy dog eyes, the cute wagging tail. Even the most logical person can have difficulty looking past the adorable package to think about whether you are ready to adopt a dog and whether a particular dog is the right one for you, your family and your lifestyle.

One of the most common mistakes people make when adopting a dog is to select one based on the look rather than the personality. Your next furry best friend may live with you for the next decade or more, so this isn't a decision that you want to rush into. Some planning and research could help reduce your chances of disappointment and heartache later on.

How to Select the Right Dog for You

Here are a few suggestions to begin your pet finding process:

- Research a variety of breeds so that you know their “hardwired” characteristics. Every pure breed of dog has characteristics that typically accompany the breed. Knowing what these traits are may help you decide if a particular breed or breed type may be a good match for you and your lifestyle.
- If you decide on a mixed breed instead of a purebred, it can be helpful to know what breed characteristics it might have based on its heritage as well.
- There are no guarantees that a dog will exactly match a breed standard, but doing your research on breeds will stack the odds in your favor.
- Search on the internet and read breed-specific books for information about breed standards and the wide variety of breeds that are available. You will begin to get a feel for what different breeds are like. For example, you might learn that herding breeds, such as Shetland Sheepdogs and Border Collies, have a strong inclination to herd livestock, are bred to run and work for hours at a time, and will use barking, nipping/biting, chasing or a combination of all of these to control their herd. So, if you live in an apartment and have small children who take up much of your day, a dog that requires abundant exercise, loves to bark and chase small moving objects is not a good fit for your current lifestyle. You might instead want to consider an older dog with a mellower personality that will mesh well with your children and your household.
- Realistically assess how much time and money you have to spend on your new dog. Breeds with significant grooming needs will require regular trips to a groomer. Some breeds will need a lot of exercise and a lot of time from you. Some breeds may be more assertive breeds, such as terriers or working breeds, which are likely not the best choice for novice dog owners or will require more time for training and socialization.
- You should also decide on whether you have the right lifestyle for a puppy or an adult dog. While many people enjoy the thrill of having an adorable new puppy in their home, they often don't anticipate the needs of what basically is a “baby” in your household. Housetraining, socialization, basic training, and “puppy proofing” your home all take much time and effort and patience on your part. If you have a busy, hectic life, then a puppy may not be the best choice for you. There are many advantages to taking home an adult dog, such as the likelihood that the dog is already house-trained as well as may have had some training from the previous owner or owners. An adult dog has an “established” personality that you can observe and while all dogs require daily exercise, depending on the age and breed of the dog, the adult dog you acquire may not require the same amount of physical work as a puppy.

All dogs will need basic medical attention, training, grooming and exercise.

Once You Decide On A Type of Dog, What Next?

When you have narrowed down your choice to one or two breeds or breed types, you have a few options for help finding the dog.

If you wish to have a purebred, you can find a reputable breeder by:

- Asking acquaintances who have worked with a local breeder
- Visiting the American Kennel Club web site, www.akc.org, for breeder information in your area.
- Contacting the national and local sections of the breed club and asking for breeders in your area
- Contacting a breed-specific rescue organization

It is estimated that 25 – 30% of dogs in animal shelters are purebreds.

If you decide on a mixed breed, you can:

- Visit reputable internet sites such as Petfinder.com
- Visit your local animal shelters to see if a particular dog meets your criteria.

Remember that a reputable breeder, rescue or shelter will want to interview a potential owner to make sure that the dog is going to a good home. Beware of facilities or online services that will sell a dog to anyone, sight unseen.

Asking a Professional

If you are not comfortable with decision of selecting a dog on your own, you may want to enlist the help of a professional trainer or behaviorist. Many dog professionals are available for consultations to help you sort out the type of dog that is right for you. They may even accompany you to help guide your selection of your next pet. Having a professional at your side can help you avoid a potentially costly mistake.

Above all, keep in mind that the commitment you are making is one that will last for many years.

No matter whether you decide you would like a purebred or a mixed breed, every dog can provide your home with love and companionship. Remember that some dogs are better suited to fit your lifestyle than others. So, do your research and take some time to make the right decision. Selecting the right dog will help ensure that both of you will enjoy your years to the fullest.