

choosing the perfect dog

dog training basics

Petco encourages you to adopt your new dog from a shelter or another reputable animal welfare organization. Purebred puppies and dogs can often be found in shelters. Check with your local animal shelter or websites such as PetFinder to find the names and numbers of local rescue groups dedicated to your desired breed. Remember, when you adopt an animal, you save two lives: the life of the animal you adopted and the life of the animal you just made room for in the shelter. If you would rather purchase a dog, do your research and be sure to use a reputable breeder.

The decision to add a dog to your family is exciting and sometimes overwhelming. What type of dog is best for your family and current situation? Asking yourself the right questions and researching your chosen breed can go a long way toward helping you and your family find the perfect canine companion.

Dogs come in a wide range of sizes, temperaments, colors, coat types and exercise requirements. Before making a decision on the right breed for your family, ask yourself some honest questions:

What exactly does your family expect from this dog?

Do the kids want a furry friend to play fetch with? Does dad want a jogging partner? Does mom want a canine companion to cuddle? A dog is a family pet, and everyone in the family needs to understand what your dog can and cannot do. Fetching is a natural instinct with some breeds and may require additional training for others. Some breeds are ideal for stamina and long jogs, while others are more like “couch potatoes.” Some dogs prefer to sit near their family members instead of cuddling with them. Be certain everyone is clear on what they want from the family dog and



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

try to choose your breed accordingly.

How much time do you have to spend with a dog?

Most dogs do best when allowed to spend as much time as possible with their family. Some breeds are content to simply sit or lie next to you, while others may need a job to keep them out of trouble and keep their mind busy. If your family is away from home most of the time, perhaps a dog is not the right companion for you right now as they do require a lot of interaction.

How much grooming are you prepared to do or pay a professional to do?

Each coat type requires its own grooming routine. The short, flat coat of the doberman requires much less time and energy than the long, beautiful tresses of the Afghan hound. As a general rule, short-haired coats tend to be “wash and wear,” while longer hair will need regular brushing and may need clipping or occasional shaving to look its best and to keep the dog’s skin healthy. Some breeds require monthly grooming. Some hairless varieties even need specific skin care, more frequent baths, the regular application of a lanolin-free skin cream and sun block when they go outside. Carefully research your preferred breed’s grooming needs. Don’t forget dental care and toenail clipping.

How much hair are you willing to put up with in your house?

Not all dogs shed. Double-coated breeds shed seasonally (spring and fall), while single-coated breeds do not shed—instead, dead hair falls out as it is replaced with new growth throughout the year. Short hair, while less visible, may actually be more difficult to clean up than clumps of longer hair.

How big is your yard and how important are your gardens?

Some dogs may get all the exercise they need following you around the house. More active dogs need a large yard and access to frequent walks and romps in the park. If you keep an award-winning garden, be sure to train your dog where it is okay to romp around and possibly dig.

How physically active are you?

Match your dog’s exercise needs with your own activity level. Short-legged, slow breeds will frustrate the active jogger, and quick, energetic breeds may exhaust the physically frail or inactive.

How old are your children?

Not all dogs love the quick movements and shrill voices of young children. Some smaller or more delicate breeds may even be injured by sudden toddler hugs. And some young children could be knocked down or overwhelmed by very large or unruly dogs.

Has every family member been involved in determining appropriate behaviors?

All dogs need consistent training, but some may need more than others. Match the breed’s temperament and training needs to your level of patience and available time for training.

Will this be your first dog?

Some breeds make wonderful first pets. Others benefit more from pet parents with prior dog experience. First-time dog pet parents might be best served by adopting a young adult dog from a knowledgeable shelter rather than purchasing a puppy.

Puppy or adult dog?

There aren’t many things as cute and appealing as a puppy. Getting a puppy allows you to be in on the training at the earliest of stages, leaving little unknown. But puppies also go through many learning stages and must be trained in all aspects of family life, including establishing polite manners, house-training and bathroom locations. In short, puppies are a lot of work.

All puppies should stay with their mom and littermates for at least 8 weeks.

Adult dogs, on the other hand, have worked through all of their puppy issues. Depending on what sort of early life they had, they may come relatively trained, with personality and habits already established. This can be a good thing or an added challenge.

Purebred or mixed breed?

Purebred puppies have years of careful breeding behind them to develop a consis-

tent look, temperament and size. Looking at that tiny bundle of fluff, you have a good idea of what it will grow into. Reputable breeders can give you information about what genetic issues you should watch for in their breed and should guarantee their puppies against most of the common ones. Purebred dogs can be expensive and, depending on the breed, difficult to find. Registration papers are not a guarantee of quality. Try to see the puppy's mother and father to get a good idea of temperament and eventual size. Mixed breed puppies can be a wonderful combination of all of the best traits of the various breeds represented. But it can be difficult to guess the eventual size and temperament of the grown dog. Mixed breeds tend to be less expensive than purebreds, and can be found at almost any shelter or rescue agency. First-time dog pet parents might do best adopting a young adult mixed breed from a shelter that can give them good information on the dog's current and expected temperament.

Research your favorite breeds:

Attend or watch shows and performance events to get the best idea of all the breeds available to you. Several large dog shows, such as the Westminster Kennel Show, are now being televised. This is a great place to start. Talk to and visit breeders, veterinarians and pet parents of breeds you are interested in. Read as much as you can find on your chosen breeds so you can get a variety of opinions. Some great internet resources include:

Petco: petco.com

The American Kennel Club: akc.org

The United Kennel Club: ukcdogs.com

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, contact your veterinarian.