

PETS

Choosing the Right Dog: Find Your Perfect Canine Friend

While the rewards of owning a dog are huge, so too are the responsibilities. To find the perfect dog, it's important to choose one that best fits in with your lifestyle.

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What kind of dog is best for you?

If you've decided a dog is the right pet for you, congratulations. People with dogs tend to be healthier and happier. They also suffer less from depression, stress, high blood pressure, heart disease, and loneliness than those without a canine in their lives. A close relationship with a dog can provide you with years of protection, companionship, and unconditional love.

While the rewards of owning a dog are probably greater than any other pet, they also come with a lot of responsibilities—and expenses. All dogs need daily outdoor exercise, regular medical check-ups, and a lot of attention from their owners. To make sure you find the perfect dog for you, there are a number of factors to consider:

One size doesn't fit all

What size dog fits your lifestyle? Even though it seems logical that a smaller dog would be happier than a larger one in an apartment without a yard, that isn't necessarily true. All dogs do need daily exercise and outdoor activity, but some need more than others.

For example, oversized Newfoundlands actually prefer lounging around home and taking leisurely walks. And the tiniest of terriers can be extremely rambunctious and need lots of exercise and outdoor stimulation.

Puppy or mature dog?

There's no denying that puppies are adorable, but along with the cuteness comes added responsibility. Puppies require more time and attention for house training and behavior training, which may include patiently tolerating "accidents" and chewing phases. For these reasons, people who don't have time for a puppy or prefer not to deal with training, often decide to adopt an older dog.

Additionally, small children or elderly adults in your family may not have the patience or ability to manage a puppy's exuberance.

Purebred or mixed breed dogs

Another choice may be between a purebred or mixed breed. Some people prefer purebred dogs because they enjoy participating in dog shows, or are drawn to the "look" or characteristics of a particular breed.

Other people prefer mixed breed, "one-of-a-kind" dogs. Adopting a dog that needs a good home, whether it's a puppy or mature dog, a purebred or a mixed breed, can be very rewarding. Some people say adopted dogs exhibit a special bond and appreciation for their owners.

Whichever type of dog you prefer, there are advantages and disadvantages to consider.

Purebred

Pros:

- Tend to know general physical characteristics, such as size.
- Tend to know general behavioral characteristics, such as temperament, personality.

Cons:

- Greater risk of genetic health problems.
- Expensive to purchase, unless adopted from breed-specific rescue.
- Every dog is individual; you're not guaranteed a certain personality or appearance just because the dog is a purebred.

Mixed breed

Pros:

- Genetic diversity means less prone to health problems.
- Desirable qualities of more than one breed, such as size, temperament, personality.
- Less expensive or nominal "adoption" fee.

Cons:

- Less certainty about physical and behavioral characteristics, especially with a puppy. However, if you can identify the type of puppy (e.g. Lab mix), you have better chance of knowing how he'll turn out.
- Characteristics of more than one breed can be both good and bad.

Breeds of dog: Which one is right for you?

There are over 150 different types of purebred dogs, and an exponentially larger number of mixed breeds. You can narrow down your choices by realistically matching a dog's "happiness factors" with your own. Hang around dog parks and talk to other dog owners. They can give you clues as to whether a certain type of dog will be happy with what you are able to provide.

[\[Read: The Health and Mood-Boosting Benefits of Pets\]](#)

Keep in mind that dogs were originally bred to serve specific functions. Kennel Clubs have divided dog breeds into **seven different groups**, based on those origins:

- 01. Herding dogs** (Collies, Old English Sheepdogs, Australian Shepherds) thrive on a farm with animals to herd. To be happy and well-adjusted in an urban setting they need lots of exercise, a job to do, or to be involved in a sport such as agility training or obedience.
- 02. Hounds** (Beagles, Bassets, Greyhounds) naturally track other animals—and humans—by smell or sight. Sight-driven dogs move quickly, their speed and stamina making them difficult to catch if they get away from you. Smell-driven dogs move more slowly, but are prone to wander off to track a scent. They can be very vocal, howling or baying.
- 03. Non-Sporting dogs** (Chows, Dalmatians, Poodles) seldom serve their original purposes—for example, Poodles hunted truffles, and Dalmatians were “coach dogs.” Non-sporting dogs are popular family companions when their individual activities levels and needs are a good match for those of family members’.
- 04. Sporting dogs** (Pointers, Retrievers, Setters, Spaniels), bred to dash around all day finding land and waterfowl for their masters, are active, alert and require daily, invigorating exercise. They like to be around people, getting lots of attention. Labrador and Golden retrievers, both members of the Sporting group, are two of the most popular family pets.
- 05. Terriers** (Westies, Fox Terriers, Wheaton Terriers) are energetic, tenacious, brave and determined... and they love to dig! Developed to hunt and kill rodents and foxes that raided farms, terriers are a feisty breed. Quite independent, they're difficult to train. Although they can be friendly, loyal and stable pets, some may be “yappy” and will nip boisterous children.
- 06. Toy dogs** (Cavalier King Charles, Chihuahuas, Yorkshire Terriers) are bred as companions—they only want to be with you! But even lapdogs need exercise. Small and fragile, they can be excitable and yappy, and can easily get under foot. Children and the elderly must take extra care around them. Loyal and intelligent, they love to learn tricks.
- 07. Working dogs** (Akita, Boxer, Doberman, Great Dane, Newfoundland) are born to “work” at a specific physical job, whether it be guarding, hauling, rescuing or sledding. Many are not ideal as family pets, but can be with proper socialization and obedience training. Independent, strong willed, and physically overpowering, they must be kept under control and gets lots of appropriate exercise.

[\[Read: Health Benefits of Walks with Your Dog\]](#)

Find a dog that matches your lifestyle

Choosing a dog based on appearance only is never a good idea. Instead, think about your lifestyle and what kind of dog will fit into that. This will ensure that both you and your canine friend end up happy.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. What kind of space can you offer the dog?

If you are going to be sharing your home with a dog, what kind of space can you offer them? For example, there are dogs that will do just fine sharing a tiny studio apartment with you, but not every breed will be happy with that arrangement.

If you live in an apartment, consider smaller breeds that adapt well to confined spaces, such as French Bulldogs, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, or Boston Terriers. On the other hand, if you have more space to offer (and preferably an outdoor area, such as a backyard or a patio) larger breeds with more energy like Labrador Retrievers or German Shepherds will be an option, too.

2. Who do you live with?

Before getting a dog, it's important to consider other members of your household. If you have kids, you'll definitely want to make sure your new canine companion is good with children. Golden Retrievers and Labrador Retrievers, for example, are known as great family dogs.

If you already have other pets in your home, consider how they will react to your new canine companion. Sporting breeds like Retrievers and Spaniels, for example, tend to have a more friendly demeanor around cats and other pets. Terriers, on the other hand, usually have a high prey drive which makes them more likely to chase after your cat.

3. How much time will you spend interacting with your dog?

Dogs are social animals and thrive on human interaction. Some breeds demand more attention, while others are more independent.

Breeds like the Border Collie, Australian Shepherd, and Labrador Retriever are highly sociable and require lots of interaction. On the other hand, Dachshunds and Greyhounds are dogs that are usually quite independent and don't require as much attention (although they still need lots of love and care).

4. How much exercise will your dog get?

Consider your own activity level and interests. Active people who enjoy outdoor adventures may prefer breeds that can keep up, such as Border Collies, Australian Shepherds, or Dalmatians. These dogs need mental and physical stimulation every day, so you should be able and willing to provide that. If you have a less active lifestyle, look for breeds that require less exercise, like Bulldogs, Basset Hounds, or Shih Tzus.

5. How much time and effort are you willing to invest in grooming?

Grooming needs vary widely among breeds. Some dogs require regular brushing, trimming, and bathing, and frequent trips to the groomer, while others have low-maintenance coats.

Short-haired breeds like Beagles, Doberman Pinschers, and Boxers need very little in terms of grooming while Poodles, Bichon Frises, and Yorkshire Terriers may need more attention as well as regular haircuts.

Where to find the dog of your dreams

Once you've narrowed down your choices, where do you find the dog of your dreams? Purebreds are usually obtained through breeders and breed specific rescue groups, although they can also be found at animal shelters. Mixed breeds are abundant at shelters and rescue groups.

Caution: Avoid buying a puppy from a pet shop or online

Many of these retailers get their dogs from "puppy mills", dog-breeding factories that treat the animals inhumanely. Over-breeding and overcrowding often lead to health and development problems in their puppies.

Responsible breeders want to meet their buyers in person to ensure that there is a good fit between the owner and the pet.

Source: Humane Society of the United States

You'll have a very different experience when visiting each of the sources for your new dog.

Breeders

Reputable breeders are the place to look for a purebred dog, as well as “designer” mixed breeds, such as Labradoodles (Labrador Retriever/Poodle mix).

Responsible breeders will encourage you to visit their facilities—often a home—to meet and interact with their dogs. Reputable breeders want to make sure that their animals are a good match with the people purchasing them and that they will be living in a healthy, loving environment. For ways to identify a reputable dog breeder and avoid those who exploit animals, see the Helpful links section below.

- **Advantages:** You’ll get to meet the parents of the puppy, and get a health guarantee, instructions for care and follow-up advice on training and behavior problems.
- **Disadvantages:** Can be costly. If animals are confined to cages, conditions are unsanitary, and many different breeds are produced, the breeder may not be reputable.

Rescue organizations

Rescue organizations literally rescue “homeless” dogs. Many come from animal shelters. Although some rescues have facilities where the animals are housed, most shelter their dogs temporarily in foster homes, at boarding facilities, or veterinary offices. In these places the animals are screened and observed for health and behavioral problems.

Rescues hold adoption events, usually on weekends, to give the public opportunities to meet available dogs. Many rescue groups have websites with photos and descriptions of their animals.

- **Advantages:** The health and behavior of dogs are screened; rescues may know if the dog is friendly with kids, other animals, strangers, etc. Adoption fees (donations) vary from nominal to costly.
- **Disadvantages:** A rigorous screening process of the prospective adoptee, and an adoption agreement/contract, are often required.

Animal shelters

Animal shelters are funded and operated by a city, county, or a private organization (usually nonprofit). Shelters are a wonderful place to find an adult dog—and sometimes puppies are even available.

Visiting an animal shelter can be depressing, with so many dogs kept in less-than-ideal conditions and confined in cages because of budgetary constraints and overcrowding. Many of the animals, fearful and in shock, will not exhibit exuberant personalities. But shelters can be a treasure trove of unpolished gems. Usually time can be spent with dogs outside of their cages, giving them an opportunity to show you how much love they can give.

- **Advantages:** Nominal adoption fees; spaying/neutering and vaccinations are often included. Volunteers often assess dog’s behavior and friendliness with other animals and people, and may be available to assist if problems arise after adoption.
- **Disadvantages:** Shelters offer no health guarantees; the history of the dog’s previous care and treatment is often unknown.

[\[Read: Best Friends: You and Your Dog\]](#)

Selecting a dog

Breeders, shelters, and rescue organizations usually let prospective owners meet and interact with available dogs. If possible, try to visit the dog a couple of times to best gauge a dog's temperament before making a decision.

- See how a dog responds when you have the chance to be with him in a pen or petting area. A dog that approaches you and wants to play may make a friendly pet. One that hides or is not approachable may require more work and time to become a good companion.
- Ask the breeder or rescue handler about a dog or puppy's characteristics. They should be able to tell you if a dog is good with other pets or children, for example.
- Observe the dog interact with littermates or other dogs.
- When selecting a puppy, kneel on the ground and call the puppy to you. Click your fingers to get the puppy's attention. If he comes quickly, he may have a strong attachment to people. If he stops to smell the flowers along the way, he may have an independent streak. If he doesn't come at all, it may be a sign that he'll have difficulty forming a bond with people.

Settling in with your new dog

- **Purchase all of the items you'll need** before bringing home your new dog, to provide the best care and comfort for him.
- **Meet with family members** to agree upon who will be responsible for which aspects of the dog's care.
- **Find a good veterinarian.** Get references from other pet owners or read reviews online.
- **Take your new pet to the vet** as soon as possible for an examination, as well as to establish a relationship with the vet, which will be ongoing. If your new canine friend has any existing or serious health problems, the sooner you find out, the more treatment options you'll have.
- **Understand that everyone in your household, including the pet, will need a little time** to get to know each other and adjust to new elements in their lives.
- **Participate in the training of your dog**, and get involved in other activities that both you and your dog will enjoy. The more time you spend with your new dog, the stronger the bond will become between you, and the greater the rewards you'll both experience.

While dogs can be hard work, they are truly remarkable companions. Try to take a moment every day to notice the many ways in which your new friend has enriched your life.

Find your perfect dog

In the U.S.	Find your new best friend from a network of over 11,500 shelters and rescues. (Petfinder) Find a pet from shelters, rescues, and individuals. (Adopt a pet)
UK	Search RSPCA rehoming centres .
Australia	AdoptaPet (RSPCA Australia)
Worldwide	Use the worldwide shelter directory to search for animal shelters, animal rescue groups, and other animal sheltering facilities in your country. (Hugs Society)

More Information

Helpful links

01. [Dog Breeds](#) - List of all dog breeds, with photos of each. (American Kennel Club)
02. [Adopting pets from animal shelters or rescues](#) - How to find a great pet that's "homeless". (Humane Society)
03. [How to find a responsible dog breeder](#) - Tips on finding a dog breeder—and avoiding puppy mills. (Humane Society)
04. [How to find a responsible dog breeder checklist](#) - Checklist of dos and don'ts when getting a dog from a breeder. (Humane Society)
05. [Choosing the Right Puppy from a Litter](#) - How to select a healthy pup. (VCA Animal Hospitals)

References

01. American Kennel Club. "Dog Breeds – Types Of Dogs." Accessed March 29, 2023.
02. The Humane Society of the United States. "How to Find a Responsible Dog Breeder." Accessed March 29, 2023.

- 03.** The Humane Society of the United States. "Adopting Pets from Animal Shelters or Rescues." Accessed March 29, 2023.
- 04.** ScienceDaily. "Stress Reduction Benefits from Petting Dogs, Cats." Accessed May 9, 2022.
- 05.** American Veterinary Medical Association. "Selecting a Pet Dog." Accessed March 29, 2023.
- 06.** Vca. "Choosing the Right Puppy from a Litter | VCA Animal Hospitals." Accessed March 29, 2023.