

Choosing your

CANINE

Companion

Many people acquire new canine family members around the holidays. It's always best to first think through the decision of what type of pet would best fit into your family. Acquiring a dog is a lifetime commitment, as it may live to be twelve years old or more. Many a dog acquired on impulse winds up in rescue through no fault of its own. Of course, when we make a commitment to train, socialize, exercise, and care for a dog, our lives can take a wonderful change for the better.

Are you thinking of giving a pup to a friend or relative for the holidays?

Before giving someone a pet for a gift, please be sure that they want to receive it. Although a dog can be a great addition to a family and make it complete — not to mention fun — it requires a lot of time and effort. Also, it's generally not best to acquire a new dog during the frenzy of the holidays, as we usually won't have enough time to devote to it then. The noise and commotion during the holidays can be very frightening to a new canine family member. It's better to physically obtain your pup right after the festivities end. If giving a pup as a gift, remember that it's generally best for people to choose their own pup. You can always give a home-

made "doggie gift certificate" for the holiday marking the event and the actual pup can be selected at a later date.

We all see pictures of adorable dogs on television and elsewhere. But when we are choosing the pup that we'll live with, it's best to research the breeds in which we're interested. Even though the border collie in the movie *Babe* is extremely intelligent and cute, it may not be the best choice for your home. In choosing a pup, it's best to first consider your lifestyle as well as the dog's needs. Border collies are bred to work for hours on end and generally won't be happy as couch potatoes.

Are you sedentary or very active? How much time do you have to devote to a pup? How much room do you have for a dog? Do you have children or other pets? These are just some of the matters to consider before obtaining a dog.

Before acquiring a dog, it's important to consider the dog's needs as well as our own. Remember: if we fail to meet a dog's needs, it will find ways to meet them itself, which may mean some destructive behaviors. Although each dog is an individual, there are general principles that govern the various breeds. Under the American Kennel Club, there are seven different groups of dogs. Even if you

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are thinking of getting a mixed breed — which can be a great choice — consider the characteristics of the breeds of which the mix is composed.

The herding breeds usually have a high work ethic and need a job to do and a sufficient amount of exercise in order to not become destructive. Border collies, German shepherds, pembroke welsh corgis, rough collies (like Lassie), and shelties are some of the more popular examples. Some have a very high herding drive that must be properly channeled, or they will herd your children, your guests — and you.

Dogs in the working group have moderate-to-high exercise needs and also need a job to perform in order to be balanced family members. Some popular examples include rottweilers, dobermans, akitas, and mastiffs. These are powerful dogs that require a firm but fair leader who will train them consistently using positive methods.

Terriers are generally very high energy dogs with a high prey drive, and they may love to dig in your yard, as many were bred to chase vermin underground. Jack (Parson) Russell terriers (like Wishbone or Eddie from Frasier), cairn terriers (think “Toto”), westies, and Scottish terriers are some examples. Dogs from the toy group generally don’t have high exercise needs and are content to sit on your lap being adored. Popular examples include Maltese, shih tzus, yorkies, and pugs.

Hounds were bred to track and hunt. Beagles, bassett hounds, greyhounds, and Afghan hounds are some examples. Dogs from the sporting group were bred to hunt and also won’t generally be content just lying around the house without exercise. These include labrador, golden, Chesapeake bay, and flat-coated retrievers. Dogs from the nonsporting group had varied functions; some examples are dalmations, chows, Boston terriers, and lhasa apsos.

All dogs require training, socialization, and exercise to be canine good citizens; however, because of their need to perform some type of work, some of the working and herding breeds, as well as some terriers, may not be the best choices for first-time dog owners. Please carefully

research the breed you may want before you make a final decision. Read and meet representative examples of the breed and talk to individuals who are knowledgeable about the breed.

In order to have a happy relationship with our canine companions, it is important to also consider our needs as well as the dog’s. We must examine our activity level and time to devote to a dog.

All dogs require regular attention, exercise, grooming, training, and socialization. Before obtaining a pup, we also need to consider the expenses that having a dog entails such as for: grooming, training, veterinary care bills, boarding, food, bedding, fencing, and crates.

We should also take into account whether all family members want the dog, as well as children and other pets we have. It’s best for children to be old enough to understand and respect the dog as a living creature and to treat it with kindness, and very young children under at least six years old may not see the dog as a living creature but as a toy or playmate. Before acquiring a new dog, also consider whether the other pets in your family are socialized and, given a sufficient time, will adjust.

Another important consideration is where to acquire your dog. If you are acquiring a purebred puppy, purchase it only from a good, knowledgeable breeder who breeds only to improve the breed, not for profit. It’s important to see the parents of your pup, so that you can have some idea about how your pup will mature. Also, it’s important to view the cleanliness of the facility. Good breeders will often ask you as many questions about your lifestyle and needs as you will ask them. Beware of purchasing from mass breeding facilities or shops that sell dogs from those facilities, as they may have dogs with genetic and behavioral problems. Good breeders do not sell to such establishments, as they want to know that their pups are going to good, appropriate homes. You can also adopt great dogs of pure and mixed breeds of all ages through animal shelters and rescue organizations.

A puppy may not meet your needs because of the housebreaking and other preliminary training required, whereas a mature dog may have already been housebroken and be more calm. Another benefit of adopting an adult dog is that you can see the final product. If you’re not sure how to choose the specific dog for you, a good breeder or rescue organization may help. Breeders who care will place a dog only with a family that they believe to be appropriate, and good rescue organizations will also try to find the right home for their dogs. You can even have a dog trainer help make your selection. If you do your research before you bring home your next canine family member, both you and your pup will have many happy years together!



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