

A Few Things To Consider When Choosing A Pup

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I always urge people to seek out a rescue group or reputable breeder when choosing a dog. Here are a few things to look for when choosing a dog or puppy.

1) **Age:** Puppies should be no younger than eight weeks. A good breeder will not place puppies younger than that. Old school used to be six weeks was fine. However, so much growth and development happens between six and eight weeks. Also think, puppies' eyes and ears open at about three weeks and they begin to test solids foods after that. A five or six week old puppy is barely weaned. The extra couple of weeks with the dam and littermates can make a big difference overall. In addition, puppies should have *at least* one set of shots before going to homes. The vaccine schedule for puppies is usually 6, 9 and 12 weeks with the first rabies booster being at 16 weeks. As for the other end of the age spectrum, older animals should always be a consideration. I am a firm believer that any dog at any age – even a senior – will have something to offer. If you go to a rescue, look at an adult dog. Just because a dog is fully-grown does not mean they are past training. Adult dogs have better bladder control and more attention span than a young puppy. Moreover, puppies are only little for a short time! Sometimes puppies in rescue may have to be placed younger than eight weeks. This is an exception to the rule and many shelters will try to find foster care for young puppies if possible. The younger you get a puppy, the more work it will be and the more patience you must have with it. Ideally, no pup should be placed before eight weeks. If a "breeder" tried to insist otherwise, get out. It is amazing how many people have litters and try to place them young because of the work and expense involved. Bear in mind; in some places, it is illegal to sell animals less than seven or eight weeks.

2) **Condition:** The puppies or dogs should show NO signs of lameness, discharge from eyes, ears, nose, etc. They should have clean, shiny coats and be alert. Their stool should be firm. A good breeder or rescue group will have no issue if you wish to have your vet examine the animal before bringing it home. Many will insist you do. If you are going to a breeder, ask what tests were run on the parents to help ensure the healthiest dogs were bred. If there were no tests done at all, leave immediately. If there were no shots given to puppies, leave immediately. A good breeder will give you some form of LONG TERM health guarantee. Many will even have a lifetime guarantee as long as you are taking proper care of the animal. Are the dogs from lines that fit the breed standard correctly – ideally they dogs should have proven themselves in both the show ring as well as in some form of performance sport like Obedience or Agility. Now, look at the condition of the facility. Is it full of feces and looks unclean? Does it have an offensive odor or smell too heavily of cleaners as if something was being hidden? Is there sign of pest infestation? What is the attitude of the people to the animals? What is the attitude of the animals?

3) **Attitude:** Is the person trying to place the pup or dog trying to push the animal on you? Is the person telling you both the pros and cons of the breed – or cross? I cringe when I hear statements like "This is the BEST dog for anyone." This is far from true. What I would like in a dog is probably different from what you want. I like active dogs with a strong work drive and moderate to high energy levels. I prefer longer coats and dogs that can handle various climates. I want something that will think nothing of hauling a pack or cart or working all day if asked to. This can be quite a handful for many people. No matter how I feel about the breeds I like and have, I would never insist it is the best breed for everyone. Anyone who tells you this should be selling used cars on the corner. I look for someone who will tell me both the good points and bad points of a dog. Having gotten animals from reputable and responsible breeders as well as rescues, I feel that people in both areas should be more than honest when trying to match a dog to you. If they seem too anxious to make that sale or adoption, I would consider strongly going elsewhere.

4) **Temperaments:** Has there been any temperament testing to the puppies or dogs? If you are a quiet, laid-back person, it could be tough to be matched with an outgoing, dominant puppy. If you are looking for a dog to compete with in sports, that quiet, shy dog would probably not work out well. A good breeder or rescue will screen the puppies or dogs to make the best match possible.

5) **Your gut:** What feeling do you get about where you are looking to get your pet – be it a reputable and responsible breeder or a rescue? In addition, when considering a rescue, many are tempted to rescue that hardship case. Use your brain. Having rescued hardship cases, I can personally say it is a HUGE amount of dedication, work and money. Multiple trips to vets, medications, worries about potential behavior issues and how to deal with them, time, effort and money can easily run into the thousands before you realize it. It is noble to wish to help all the hardship cases out there. In reality, can you devote the time and effort? Many hardship cases end right back in rescue. Use your brain as well as your heart.

I hope I have outlined, adding a dog to your life is no small thing. It is time, commitment, money and even heartache. Impulse buying a pup from a pet store (the worst place to look for a pet) or grabbing the local paper and reading the plethora of ads from people breeding for the same of it often lead to bad placements and even trouble.

It is your responsibility as a future dog owner to research your life as well as various breeds or types of dogs to help make the best match for you. It is your responsibility to find well-educated and committed people to help match you with the best canine companion. It is your responsibility to ensure the dog is well trained, socialized and the safest he can be.