



Choosing a Puppy

So you want a dog! Do the entire family buy into the idea? Experience has shown that if one or more are against a pet, then bringing an animal into that environment can cause considerable family friction and stress. Have you weighed up the financial and time implications? These can be considerable: owning a dog is a serious commitment and should never be taken lightly.

You should take into consideration your health, age, and overall time constraints. Do you want an active or sedentary animal? Some dogs demand and require almost constant attention, lots of exercise and mental stimulation. Others are more laid back; therefore you need to research which dog will suit you and your family's outlook and lifestyle that includes living arrangements. For instance if you live in a flat and had limited time, a Border Collie or Springer Spaniel type dog would be madness, and would most probably lead to serious behavioural difficulties. Not only for the dog!

Lots of people buy a dog because they like the look of them, without taking into account the needs and temperament of that breed. You need to research both the positive and the negative side of your chosen breed and make sure what you are looking for is suitable for your environment and lifestyle. Make sure you have fully decided on the breed before you start looking for your new addition to the family.

Check out our Udemy Pre-Puppy Purchase course.

PUPPIES: WHERE TO BUY

It may be useful to contact the breed club of the type of dog you are looking for, as they generally know each professional breeder. They should be able to point you in the direction of available quality pups.

If you have decided on a puppy then there are some fundamental rules to follow:

Rule 1. Never ever buy a puppy from anywhere or anyone without being able to see at least one (or preferably both) parents. The excuses commonly used are: the mother's ill or not available, or she's at friends, or they are selling a pup for someone else. Puppies from "puppy farms" generally have major problems throughout their lives. It may not be a farm, but have kennels that are clear, airy, and bright and, on the face of it, look like a professional establishment. But if you cannot meet at least one parent or there are lots of different breeds of pups there then do not even consider buying a puppy.

Rule 2. Never buy a puppy from a Pet Shop or any other similar outlet. You could be supporting the horrific trade in puppy-farmed dogs.

Rule 3. Never buy on impulse or because you feel sorry for a frightened and timid puppy.

Rule 4. Do not automatically believe that your dog is a pedigree. Just because the breeder supplies a certificate, especially if parents cannot be seen, they may not be worth the paper they are printed on. Do not automatically think that if you go through the Kennel Club route that those dogs and breeders have all been personally checked or vetted by that organisation. This is not the case: the Kennel Club do not have the facilities, ability or time to check the credentials of all the breeders on their books.

Rule 5. Unless you are an experienced handler/dog owner then do not pick the puppy that bounds up to you and pushes all the others out the way to get to you. Do not also go to the other end of the scale and pick the runt or the frightened one, because you feel sorry for it. You are far better off picking a pup from the middle ranks. The breeder should be able to advise you on this. Alternatively you can employ a behaviourist or specialist who can assess the pups using specialised puppy assessment tests. Ask me!

Make sure you handle the puppies. If they become distressed or shy away this could mean that they have not been properly handled and socialised. If the puppies have been socialised



correctly, then they will adapt and accept situations that are potentially stressful. You should then end up with a happy well-balanced dog in maturity.

Check the appearance of the mother and puppies. Do they appear healthy; eyes clear and bright, free of any discharge? Are their coats shiny? If possible get confirmation of the eye and hip scores of both the mother and the father. If the breeder allows you, always stroke and fuss the parents, check their temperament, look for signs of aggression, fearfulness, nervousness, or 'neurotic' symptoms such as chewing feet, tail, skin damage, or pacing etc.

This is especially important in the mother, as it has been shown that it is the mother that shapes the behavioural future of the offspring.

If you have any reservations, do not buy a puppy.

TAKING YOUR PUPPY HOME

If possible, try to visit the puppies at least twice, at 4/5 weeks and again when you pick up the pup. The best age to take the puppy home is 7-8 weeks.

It can help to leave a small blanket or towel on your first visit, so that it gets the mother and the litter smell on it, this should provide some comfort for your pup in the first week or so at home.

Before bringing your new dog home, make sure your garden is safe and secure. Purchase a collar, lead, bowls, and dog tag (with address and telephone number), bed, toys and treats etc. Check with the breeder what she is feeding the pups: a good breeder will supply you with some food and give you a feeding chart. Find a good Vet in your area.

When you pick up the pup take a crate/indoor kennel or a cardboard box with you and line it with newspaper. Take spare newspaper with you as the pup may be sick and will almost certainly urinate and defecate on the journey, especially if it is any distance.

When you get home place the bed or crate near somewhere warm. If you are using a crate then cover it with a blanket or sheet to make it more den-like. Introduce the puppy to the crate gradually and positively (see separate advice sheet).

It can help to have a loud ticking clock near the bed or crate and/or have a radio on in another room tuned into talk not a music station. You can also put in a hot water bottle; this will mimic the heat from the mother and siblings over the first few nights. Make sure it is well covered or you may get a very wet bed/crate!

Your new puppy will need lots of sleep, just like a human baby, so make sure he gets lots of rest. Rough handling by children or adults should not be allowed, but do give plenty of gentle handling.

It is vitally important to book your puppy into a good puppy class. Make sure that they do not have more than 6-8 dogs in any one class and that the trainers do not allow the puppies to just jump on one another and play together at the start of the class. Integration of the puppies in the class should be careful and slow to avoid problems and long term bad manners in later life.

We run Perfect Puppy classes in Bangor, Comber and near Kircubbin. See the website (www.downdog.co.uk) for details.

Puppies need lots of time, care and patience. Follow the above guidelines and your efforts will be positively rewarded and you will have the world's best companion; "The Dog".

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