



Choosing a Puppy

So you want a puppy. Does everyone in the family buy into the idea? If not, it 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.

Take into consideration your lifestyle, health, age, and overall time constraints. For instance if you live in a flat and had limited time, getting a Border Collie or Springer Spaniel would be madness, and would most probably lead to serious behavioural difficulties. Not only for the dog...

Most importantly, watch our Pre-Puppy Purchase webinar and read the handouts.

You can find it here: <https://downdog.co.uk/PrePupSeminar>

There are four 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 often 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.

The seller's property 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 on impulse or because you feel sorry for a frightened and timid puppy.

Rule 3. 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.

Equally, do not automatically think that if you find a breeder listed by a breed club or the Kennel Club that those dogs and breeders have all been personally checked or vetted by that organisation. This is not the case: but looking for a Kennel Club Assured Breeder will give you the best chance of finding a well-brought up, sound temperament puppy.

Rule 4. 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. The best breeders will quiz you thoroughly before letting you have one of their pups! Alternatively you can employ a behaviourist or specialist who can assess the pups using specialised puppy assessment tests. Just ask me!

Other things to do

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. Properly socialised puppies mean happy well-balanced dogs 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, barking, 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), crate, toys and food toys.

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 pee and poo on the journey, especially if it's 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 a talk 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) must not be allowed, but do give plenty of gentle handling and cuddles.

GET HELP

For more help with your new puppy, buy my puppy bible, *Pesky Puppy to Perfect Pet*, from Amazon on Kindle or in paperback. It gives you all the information you need to bring up a great family pet.

My second book, *Chaos to Calmish: Diary of a Pesky Puppy's First Year*, tells the story of my latest puppy, charting what happened during that crazy first year. It tells of all the successes we had but also the failures and mistakes I made, too.

It's vitally important to book your puppy into a good puppy class such as our Perfect Pet courses in Bangor, Newtownards and at our base near Kircubbin. See the website (<https://downdog.co.uk/PerfectPet>) for details and to book.

If you live too far away, or can't get to classes, think about an online Consultation Call or one of our online courses (<https://downdog.co.uk/Online>).

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".