



PREPARING FOR A NEW POOCH

Before your new puppy or dog arrives, there are a few things you need to get ready to make sure they'll be comfortable and happy in their new home.

Water bowls

Choose heavy-bottomed ceramic or stainless steel water bowls. Plastic bowls could end up as chew toys, and the tooth marks can become a haven for bacteria and potentially damage teeth and gums. A heavy bowl will also be harder for your new pooch (and you) to knock over by accident. You don't need a food bowl – feed food by hand or in food toys and use it for training.

Something to chew on

Dogs love chewing. A teething puppy or dog will chew anything they can get their jaws around. If you want to protect your socks, shoes and sofa, buy a selection of chews for your puppy or dog to test their teeth on instead. Just make sure they're non-toxic, durable and not too tough for puppy or dog teeth. And never leave your puppy or dog alone with anything that could choke them or might splinter.

Toys to play with

There's an amazing selection of dog toys out there. Take a look in your local pet shop or go online: you'll find safe rings, balls, slings, tugs and fabric frisbees. Or make your own tug/chew toys from an old T-shirt or similar - tear them into strips and plait them.

Grooming kit

Visit your pet shop to pick up a comb or a brush and plan daily grooming sessions. Different coats will need different tools -- ask the pet shop staff or your puppy's breeder for advice. You'll also need to clip your dog's nails and give them a bath from time to time, so it's worth picking up a pair of nail clippers and some dog-friendly shampoo too.

Stair gates

Stairs, balconies and ponds must all be out of bounds for an inquisitive puppy or dog. A strategically placed baby gate will do the job when you're not there to supervise. Baby gates can be used to restrict where your puppy or dog can go, which helps protect your furniture and possessions from their unstoppable chewing instinct.

A play pen isn't essential but can be very useful to keep your puppy safe when you are busy in dangerous places like the kitchen or when you haven't time to watch your puppy.

Using a crate

Your crate must be big enough for your puppy or dog to turn around in comfortably and to lie down flat out. Dogs hate to toilet in their own bed, so a crate is a great toilet-training aid in those first few weeks while your puppy or dog is adjusting to their new routine. You can also use it in the car. Buy some bedding or use an old blanket or towels so your new puppy or dog has somewhere warm, comfortable and draught-free to sleep.

Food

Ask your breeder or the rescue centre what food your puppy or dog has been used to. Most responsible sellers will provide enough food for the first few days to avoid a sudden change in diet which may have unpleasant digestive consequences.



If you decide to change your pooch's diet, ensure that you change over gradually over 5 days by mixing the new food in with the old 1/5 at a time. There is a huge variety of foods available. The best advice is to choose the most expensive food you can afford. In general, the better foods have fewer ingredients – and you should recognise them.

A collar and lead

You won't be able to take your new puppy or dog out for walks until they've had all their injections, but you can carry them to take them out and about. You can spend this time getting them used to wearing their collar and lead during toilet training and when you are carrying them. That way, it won't be an issue when it's time to explore the outside world on their own four paws.

Collars and leads come in a variety of materials. Nylon or soft leather adjustable collars are recommended, as they'll grow with your puppy or dog. Adjust so that you can comfortably put a couple of fingers between the collar and your puppy or dog's neck. Check the fit regularly; you'll be amazed at how fast puppies grow. Choose a flat type lead that feels comfortable to hold (preferably NOT an extending lead).

If you have a very small dog, like a small terrier or a toy breed you might prefer to use a harness – it makes it easy to protect delicate necks.

Identification tag

By law, all dogs must wear a tag on their collar showing their owner's name and address. It's a good idea to add your phone number too. You can order a tag over the internet or print one yourself at your local pet shop.

All puppies and dogs also need microchipping: it's quick, permanent and effective. Microchipping means you'll have a much better chance of being reunited if your puppy or dog goes missing. If you are rehoming a rescue dog, check with the rescue to find out if the dog has already been microchipped. If so, make sure you re-register the chip to your name and address.

Your puppy or dog's first visit to the vet

Ask neighbouring dog owners to recommend a good vet. As soon as your dog is used to you and their new home, take them for a visit. Besides a general check-up, you'll need to talk about worming, vaccinations and microchipping (if not done).

Take some yummy treats along and make a big fuss of your dog while there. With the right vet practice and a positive attitude, a trip to the vets should be fun for your dog, not scary.

Pet insurance

You should also have a chat with your vet about treatment costs and pet insurance. Many vets have their own treatment plans or schemes to cover routine healthcare. The insurance plan must include third party insurance. A lifetime cover plan is best (ignore annual or injury only plans). It's not worth skimping on insurance.

Training class

Book your dog's training as soon as you can. Preventing problems is so much easier than trying to stop them once they've started. And classes help with socialisation too.

We run our Perfect Pet training classes in Bangor, Newtownards and Kircubbin – see the website for details and to book. We also provide 1-2-1 packages to help you and your new dog in your own home. All details and booking are on the website www.downdog.co.uk