

No Hasty Decisions!

Points To Ponder

by Sherri Regalbuto

Before going out and getting a dog, consider this. Most rescue or shelter dogs would never have been given-up if their owner had done some research. Some people never fully understand the huge commitment involved with having a dog until it's too late. You need to be sure that you are willing to sacrifice sleep, everyday routine, a spotless house or your free lifestyle. Picking the wrong breed can have the same effect. Know your own limits.

Do your homework. Research the breed you are interested in and call around. Talk to rescue groups, local vets and breed clubs. Be patient. If you are in a hurry to get a pup, you're more likely to make a mistake.

These are things everyone should consider before getting a dog. The answers can help you decide if you are ready for a dog, the best to get a dog and what breed you think might fit nicely into your family and your lifestyle.

Things you need to think about:

- Puppies are a lot of work, are you prepared for the challenge of a puppy? If the answer is not clear, or is "no" perhaps you would prefer an older dog.
- Are you willing to spend a lot of time on training or would you like to spend as little time as possible on training? (Be warned: even dogs reputed to be "easily" trainable take a great deal of effort and time!)
- How much room does your house have for a dog? How much room are you willing to give up, for your new dog?
- Do you have a highly decorated home with many breakable items, which are not replaceable?
- Do you have a yard or will you need to walk the dog for elimination purposes?
- Is your yard fenced? Do you have a dog run or will you build one? Will you be able to install a doggie door?
- How old are your children? This is important! A new puppy is like adding a toddler to the family.
- Do you have a hectic, full lifestyle or do you have time to accommodate an additional family member?
- Do you care about hair all over the house?
- Is anyone allergic to dog dander in your home?
- How much grooming time are you willing to spend on a dog? Can you afford to send your dog to the groomer every couple of months if necessary?
- Have you considered that most dogs live approximately 8-15 years?
- Where will your dog stay when you go away? Who will care for him/her?
- Will this dog be an additional family member or spend a lonely life in the backyard?
- Will a dog be able to join you on social outings?
- Can you afford the vet bills? They can really add up.
- What about exercise? Some breeds need a tremendous amount of energy outlet to be a well-mannered housedog. Others need little. But all dogs need ample exercise!
- Can you come home at lunch for your pup? Will you hire a dog walker to break up their day, if you work long hours?
- After a hard day at the office, do you want to come home and exercise the dog and spend quality time with them? You must consider their needs.
- Why do you want a dog?
- Is there a particular canine activity you are interested in?
- Do you want a couch potato/lap dog?
- The cost of dog supplies can be high; beds, leashes, collars, toys, etc. Can you afford this?
- All dogs should have an education and the cost of training should be considered.

Whether you get your dog at a shelter, rescue, the guy down the street or from another family, you want to know as much as possible about this dog.

When you visit a shelter, try to have a size in mind. This helps to eliminate any spontaneous decisions that you may regret later.

YOU WANT TO LOOK FOR:

- A dog that comes to the front of the cage wagging. Or a dog that comes right up to you when you enter the room.
- A clean facility.
- A dog that is very interested in interacting with you and your family.
- A dog that responds well with all family members when out of the kennel.
- If you have children, be very sure it reacts positively with them.
- Has been temperament tested for obvious behavior problems.
- Specifically aggression, object or food guarding or problems with close proximity.
- Looks healthy, has shots and worming done. (Ask for certificate)
- Is close to the size, coat type, and activity level that will fit your family.
- As much information as possible on this particular dog.
- What is the best guess to what this mix is? (Although sometimes impossible to tell.)
- This is important: you may end up with a dog that is very high energy or not willing to participate in canine activities that you had hoped for. Try to gauge their energy level by observing them and asking about their behavior.
- How old is the dog and how big will this pup get?

Bringing home a rescue dog can be a wonderful experience. As well as researching a specific breed, you must research each mix breed individually before you find the perfect match. Not all rescues or adopted dogs will fit your lifestyle. It is better to pass on a dog than take it because you feel badly, only to find out it may not be a match. This only causes the dog to be abandoned again.

Whatever you are looking for in a companion, do your best to pick a dog that will be with you for the rest of their life. I think dogs are the most wonderful creatures we can share our lives with. Once you find the one, take the time to build a special bond that only a dog can offer. You'll both be happy you did.

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