

Selecting the Family Dog, How To Find the Dog of Your Dreams

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"Select" is defined in the dictionary by such phrases as "a preferred choice" or "carefully chosen". Selecting the family dog should be a well-researched and carefully soul-searched activity. Are you and your family willing to make a 10 - 15 year commitment to this sentient being in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, for as long as all shall live? Let's pose some of the questions family members should discuss before obtaining a dog.

How Old Are the Members of My Family?

If the youngsters in your household are under seven years old, they are usually not developmentally suited for puppies 5 months old and under or toy-sized (under 15 pounds) dogs of any age. Puppies have ultra sharp "milk teeth" and toenails and often teethe on and scratch children, resulting in unintentional injury to the child. The puppy becomes something to be feared rather than loved.

Toy dogs are fine-boned, touch-sensitive creatures that do not weather rough or clumsy handling well. They break relatively easily and are quicker to bite than their larger boned, mellower relatives.

Unless your children are unusually sensitive, low-key, respectful individuals, a medium-to-large sized dog over 5 months old is usually the safer choice. Regardless of size, all interactions between small children and dogs should be monitored by a responsible adult. When there is no one to watch over them, they should be separated.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, are there frail elderly or physically challenged individuals in the household? If so, strong vigorous adolescent dogs are not a wise idea. No aging hips or wrists are safe from these yahoos. People who were one-breed fans throughout their lives may one day find that their favorite breed demands more than they can physically handle. The new dog must fit the current physical capabilities of his keepers with an eye toward what the next 10-15 years will bring.

Who Will Be the Dog's Primary Caretaker?

A decade or so back, this was an easy question to cleaned and raised the family dog. Most families to go to work and the kids head off to school. This lessons and sports and household chores and so Caretaker to make sure the dog does not get lost in



answer-- Mom. She stayed home and cooked, these days do not have that option. All adults have leaves the family dog to be sandwiched in between on. One parent should be designated Primary the shuffle.

Some parents bow to the pressure their children tears in their eyes that they will religiously take care of this soon-to-be best friend. The truth of the matter is, during the 10 - 15 year lifespan of the average dog, your children will be growing in and out of various life stages and the family dog's importance in their lives will wax and wain like the Moon. You cannot saddle a child with total responsibility for the family dog and threaten to get rid of it if the child is not providing that care. It is not fair to child or dog.

Choosing the family dog should include input from all family members with the cooler-headed, more experienced family members' opinions carrying a bit more weight. The family dog should not be a gift from one family member to all the others. The selection experience is one the entire family can share. Doing some research and polling each family member about

what is important to them in a dog will help pin down what you will be looking for. Books like Daniel Tortora's THE RIGHT DOG FOR YOU or The ASPCA Complete Guide to Dogs can be tremendously helpful and can warn you away from unsuitable choices for your family's circumstances.

How Much Can I Spend?



The price to obtain a dog runs the gamut from free-to-a-good-home to several thousand dollars. It does not always hold true that you get what you pay for. The price you pay in a pet shop is usually 2 to 3 times higher than what you pay a reputable breeder for a puppy of similar (or usually better) quality.

Too many folks spend all their available cash on a pet shop purchase and then have no money left for initial veterinary care, a training crate or obedience classes--all necessary expenses. Remember, the purchase price of a dog is a very small part of what the dog will actually cost. Save money for food (especially if it is a large or giant breed), grooming (fancy coated breeds such as Poodles, Cockers, and Shih Tzus need to be clipped every 4 to 6 weeks), chew toys (the vigorous chewers like a Bull Terrier or Mastiff can work their way through a \$8.00 rawhide bone in a single sitting), outerwear (short-coated breeds like Greyhounds, Chihuahuas, and Whippets must have sweaters and coats in the winter or in lavishly air conditioned interiors), and miscellaneous supplies (bowls, beds, brushes, shampoos, flea products, odor neutralizers for accidents, baby gates, leashes, collars, heartworm preventative etc.).

And then, there is the veterinary emergency! Very few dogs live their entire lives without at least one accident. Your puppy eats a battery or pair of pantihose, your line-boned toy breaks a leg, your big boy has bad hips, your dog gets hit by a car or beaten/bitten by the neighborhood bully. These surprises can cost \$500 or more. Unlike our children, most of our dogs are not covered by health insurance.

But "How much can I spend?" is not only a question of money. How much time and energy can you spend on a new dog?

Various breeds and ages of dog make different demands on our precious spare time. In general, the Sporting, Hounds, Herding, and Terrier breeds will demand more time in training and daily exercise than will the Guardian or Companion breeds. A puppy or adolescent will need more exercise, training, and supervision than will an adult dog. And the first year with any new dog regardless of age or breed type will put more demands on the owner than any other time, for this is when you are setting up house rules and routines which will last for the lifetime of your dog.



America has become a nation of disposable pet owners.

Doesn't your family dog deserve better?

Choose wisely, for when the bond breaks, everybody concerned suffers.

Make selecting your new family dog a life-affirming act.

