

Choosing a dog



Dogs as pets can assist people to be healthier, happier and suffer less stress. The relationship with a dog can provide you with years of wonderful companionship, protection and safety. It doesn't matter what breed or size of dog it is, what matters is whether the size and breed fits your lifestyle and you can give the dog an appropriate and loving home.

While the rewards of having a dog are great, so are the responsibilities that come with ownership. All dogs need daily outdoor exercise, regular medical checks, and attention from their owners. To make sure you find the dog that is the best for you, it's important to make a choice of dog that best fits in with your lifestyle.

What to consider when choosing the type of dog

There are a number of factors to consider and these should be given a lot of thought before you make your final decision:

Size

The size of the dog will fit into your lifestyle may surprise you. It isn't necessarily true that a small breed would be happier in an apartment or a house with a smaller yard. All dogs need to have daily exercise and outdoor activity, but some breeds need a lot more than others.

For example, greyhounds and Great Danes generally love lounging around the home and taking a slower leisurely walk. Some of the smaller breeds, particularly some terriers, can be full on speed demons with seemingly unending energy that need lots of attention, exercise and outdoor stimulation.



Age

Puppies are adorable, but you have extra responsibilities when you have a puppy. Puppies require more time and attention for house training, socialization and behaviour training. You need to know that puppies, like children, go through maturing stages that may include, chewing, digging and other behaviours that require special attention and patience. Dogs, particularly puppies, don't come ready trained, so you have a lot of training to do before a puppy becomes an obedient and polite companion. For these reasons, people who don't have time for a puppy's needs often opt to have an older dog.



Purebred or mixed breed

Another choice may be between a purebred or mixed breed. Some people prefer purebred dogs because they like the characteristics of a particular breed. Owning a pure bred dog does not always guarantee good breeding and a healthy dog with a sound temperament. There are breeders that continue to breed dogs that may have temperament faults and health issues. Owning a pure breed dog with 'papers' or 'without papers' makes absolutely no difference to the average pet owner. It only has real relevance if you intend to become a registered dog breeder.

Other people prefer a mixed breed, "one-of-a-kind" dogs. Mixed breed dogs come from a larger genetic pool and often it can be a great mix, producing sound health and temperament. It is unfortunate that many mixed breeds are labelled with a trendy name, giving unsuspecting owners the impression that they have a pure breed. For instance, the 'oodle' mixes. If it's a cavoodle, spoodle, or any other fashionable name, it's still a mixed breed. The unfortunate thing about these types of dogs is that people often pay very high prices for their new dog. Higher even than a pure breed.



Whichever type of dog you prefer, there are advantages and disadvantages to consider:

Which dog will be happy with your lifestyle

There are between 100 and 200 different types of purebred dogs, and a huge number of mixed breeds. To find out whether your choice of breed, or mix breed will be happy living with you; Visit your nearest dog club and talk to other dog owners and instructors. They can give you clues as to whether a certain type of dog will be happy with what you are able to provide.

Dogs were originally bred to serve specific functions. Breeds have been divided into groups, to help identify their purpose and functionality. The lists below may assist you in choosing a breed.

1. **Herding dogs** (*Kelpies, Cattle dogs, Collies, Australian Shepherds*) To be content and well-adjusted in an urban setting they will need lots of physical and mental exercise. The mental exercise is often the major factor in keeping these dogs well balanced. They need have something to do, such as be involved in a dog sports like agility, tracking, scent work or obedience.



2. **Hounds** (*Dachshund, Greyhounds, Wolfhounds, Beagles*) These breeds naturally use their smell or sight to follow humans and animals. Sight dogs such as Greyhounds move quickly and can be hard to catch if they are off chasing things. Dogs that sniff, such as Beagles move more slowly but are prone to wander off when following scent. Some hounds are also prone to be barkers or may even howl on a regular basis.



3. **Non Sporting dogs** (*Schipperkes, Dalmatians, Poodles*) These breeds are often chosen to be a good family dog. They have varying backgrounds but have developed over the years as being a popular choice for the 'family' dog.



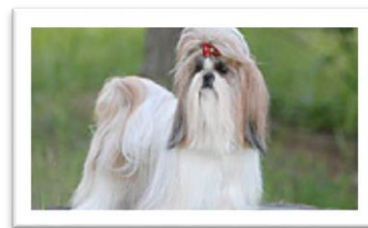
4. **Gun dogs** (*Curly Coat Retrievers, Cocker Spaniels, Golden Retrievers*) These breeds are quite active and will require daily, invigorating exercise. They were bred to work with hunters and dash about retrieving game for their handlers.



5. **Terriers** (*Jack Russell Terriers, Fox Terriers, Staffordshire Terriers*) These dogs are very energetic, brave and determined to the point of stubbornness at times. They can be difficult to train. These breeds were bred to hunt and kill rodents and foxes. Although they can be very friendly and loyal some breeds can become 'nippy' and difficult to handle if not given adequate training.



6. **Toy dogs** (*Cavalier King Charles, Chihuahuas, Shih Tzu, Pug*) These dogs are bred to be companions, however, despite their size they still need exercise. Some of these dogs can become very excitable and 'yappy' without training. Most dog bites occur from small dogs. The bigger dogs that bite get the media attention, but statistically, you are more likely to be bitten by a Chihuahua or similar size dog. These breeds can be quite clever and are usually good to train.



7. **Utility dogs** (*Boxers, Rottweilers, Dobermans, Great Danes*) These dogs are bred for a specific purpose. Some of them, like Dobermans, guard. St Bernard's are bred to rescue and others, like the Malamute are used for sledding. Many are not ideal as family pets as they require a great deal of care and training. They need good socialization and obedience training. Independent, strong willed and physically overpowering, many of these type of dogs will need to be kept under control and be provided with a lot of regular and appropriate exercise.



Before you make your choice of which specific breed, or mix breed you will get, take a lot of time to read up on the health issues of the breed, the temperament issues that can occur and any other background such as need for exercise, training, grooming (can cost around \$80-\$200 to groom some dogs), specific diet. There is a lot to consider, so take time, be informed and be ready.

How to find your dog

Once you choose what type of dog you want there are a number of places to obtain your dog. Purebreds can usually be obtained through breeders and breed specific rescue groups and sometimes found at shelters. Mixed breeds are abundant at shelters and rescue groups.

A word of warning here. If you obtain a dog from a registered breeder, you should ask to see the parents so you can see for yourself what type of temperament they have. Your puppy inherits these traits from the parents so nervous, unstable dogs may be a sign that you need to look further afield for a suitable pup. Too many people take the first puppy available because they are so eager to have a dog. Remember that your choice of dog will remain your responsibility for a long time, so choose wisely. Also remember that the cost will vary for a dog with papers and one without. The papers are not necessary to have for most dog owners.

If you cannot see the parents, or the place where you go has the other dogs out of site, this may not be a good sign. Many puppy farms operate in all areas of Victoria and other states. The dogs will almost certainly cost you a lot of money but the dog you get may have some real temperament issues if the parents have been puppy farmed and mistreated. Constant breeding and keeping dogs in terrible, cramped conditions can often lead to health and development problems in the dogs. If in doubt, walk away. The best way to stop a puppy farmer is to stop buying the pups.



Pet shops – no-one should buy a puppy from a pet shop. You cannot guarantee where the dog comes from, and if in doubt, think about puppy farming and don't buy. Your puppy needs to come from a home where the parents are cared for.

Shelter dogs can be very stressed by their environment. Dogs in this state can 'shut down' displaying a placid temperament and having all the signs of a nice quiet dog. It

won't be until you get the dog out of this environment that you realize what you saw is definitely not what you got to bring home.

If possible, try to visit the dog a couple of times to best gauge a dog's temperament before making a decision.

- See how a dog responds when you have the chance to be with him in a pen or petting area. A dog that approaches you and wants to play may make a friendly pet. One that hides or is not approachable may require more work and time to become a good companion.
- Observe the dog interact with littermates or other dogs if possible.
- Ask the breeder or rescue handler about the dog or puppy's characteristics. They should be able to tell you if a dog is good with other pets or children, for example. Again, be warned that not all animal shelters will provide the right picture of the dog you may choose. Many people working at dog shelters have no training in dog behaviour and mean well, but simply do not understand dog signals and body language. They cannot provide an informed opinion on the type of dog that you are choosing.

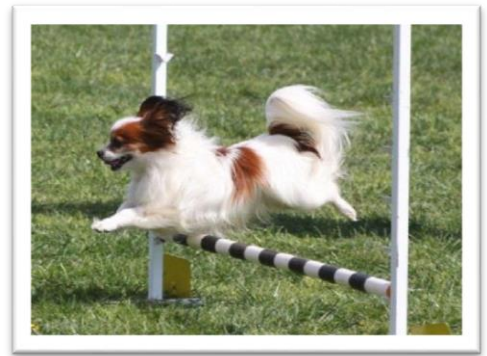


Your dog

Your dog has been chosen, now what. Here are some tips:

Socialize your dog. Avoid dog parks. Most are frequented by people that have no understanding of their own dogs and often say 'my dog is friendly'. Many dogs at dog parks are not social and this can lead to bad experiences for your dog. You can introduce the dog park after your dog has had some training and you have good control over your dog. This way, at least you can call your dog back and leave the park when an unruly dog wants to cause trouble.

Participate in the training of your dog. Basic obedience, for any breed or mix of breeds is a must. Obedience will introduce some understanding of how your dog thinks and give you the beginnings of a great bond between you and your dog. Become involved in canine activities that you and your dog will enjoy. Many people take up some form of sport or activity which includes their dog, even if it's long walks in the bush or around the local park.



Read and learn. Owning a dog is a wonderful thing. Read about how dogs think, how they behave. You will be surprised at just how much you learn and in turn, how quickly you and your dog progress from being master and pet to being great companions. You will learn to read the signs that your dog is happy, stressed, sad or content.

Enjoy. Don't just leave your dog in the backyard. They are not toys to discard because you have other interests. They are certainly not an entertainment thing for your children. This is a very dangerous practice, leaving children and dogs unattended. Dogs are animals, regardless of how much some people humanize them. They have needs so if you have made the choice to have a dog, we hope you have also chosen to make the appropriate changes to your lifestyle to accommodate your dog. You won't regret it.

