

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOG



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

A dog can be the most rewarding of pets, but also one of the most demanding. Before you acquire a dog please think first. Is there really time for a dog in your life and your home, and can you commit to your dog for at least 15 years, possibly more?



Before you start

Please consider the following:

- Does everyone in your home want a dog?
- Do you have the time to provide exercise – walks and play, in all weathers and on dark nights, etc – and give adequate daily attention such as grooming?
- Do you have time for the training and socialisation a dog will require throughout life? You will be legally responsible for your dog's behaviour so ensure training and socialisation are done correctly.
- Can you afford the vet's bills, including annual vaccinations and regular worming? Other expenses include providing a proper diet to keep your dog in good condition. Also, boarding kennel costs need to be considered if you have regular holidays where your dog will be unable to accompany you.
- Can you provide a safe and secure home for the dog for life?

Dogs of all ages are appealing, so it is easy to get carried away with the idea of taking a dog home without thinking of the consequences. Your dog may be with you for 15 years or more, so consider the time, effort and money required. Your dog's health and happiness will be your responsibility, so if you do not think you can provide care for the rest of the dog's life, please do not get one.

Remember, you will be responsible for behaviour – your dog must be taught good manners and be well socialised. Should unforeseen circumstances arise and you can no longer care for the pet, a dog with bad manners might face an uncertain future.

Which dog should I choose?

Before you take on a dog, consider what type suits you best. For example, a terrier will have a different temperament from a herding breed, and a guarding breed will be different from a toy breed. There are many books and magazines devoted to giving information on breed differences, so conduct your research carefully and in depth before committing. There are also breed rescue societies, dedicated to particular breeds, and websites giving good information on dogs.



In the case of a crossbred dog, remember it is more difficult to judge what the predominant behaviour trait might be, so get as much information about the individual dog as you can. However, many crossbreeds carry the best traits of both parents, and make wonderful companions.

If you are considering a puppy, see the All About Pets leaflet, Caring for Your Puppy (D2).

Taking on an adult dog

An adult dog may be a better option than a puppy, because the dog will probably be house trained and more settled. Your dog will probably have passed the chewing and destructive stage of life, and habits – both good and bad – will have been formed! However, do remember that an adult dog will reflect previous upbringing, so there may be some problems to try to overcome.

If you are taking an adult dog, the chances are it will be a rescue dog from one of three sources: a charity such as The Blue Cross, a private home where the owners are unable to look after the dog any longer, or a breed rescue club.

If you go to a charity centre, be guided by the staff. They know the animals in their care, and have a lot of experience in matching dogs with the right homes. The aim of any rescue centre is to find loving, long-term homes for dogs that have been the unfortunate victims of circumstance. Please remember these dogs may have had a bad start in life, most frequently through no fault of their own.

Do not be swayed by the appearance of the dog – a dog's temperament and previous history are the important factors. For example, a rescue dog may not like cats, or may not be able to live with children. If the dog has behaviour problems (for example it cannot be left alone for long), the staff at the shelter should be able to give advice and assistance in order to overcome the problem.

Taking a dog from a private home is more problematic. The person you are getting the dog from may not be the first owner, and the dog may have had several homes, so you will not get a lot of information about background. Also, if any problems arise, it is unlikely you will be able to return the dog or get ongoing help and advice.

For pure breeds, a breed rescue club will be able to give you advice about the specific breed, and about any individual dogs they are trying to find new homes for.





Choosing your dog

Having done your research, and spoken to the staff at the kennels (or to the previous owner if you are getting a dog from a private home), answer the following.

- Have you been given sufficient information about the dog's history and likes and dislikes?
- Have you had a chance to take the dog for a walk and play together so you can see what the dog is like away from the kennels, or away from home?
- Do you have a full veterinary history? What illnesses or operations has the dog had? What vaccinations have been given and have you seen proof, such as vaccination certificates? Also make sure you have a written agreement that taking the dog is subject to a satisfactory veterinary inspection within 72 hours of your doing so.
- What help or advice is available should there be veterinary or behavioural problems after you have taken the dog?

If yours is a rescue dog, make sure you find out as much information as you can. If you are adopting from a charity or a breed rescue club, check if a pet insurance cover note is available to cover any early, unforeseen veterinary costs.

Other points to remember

- Veterinary treatment can be expensive, so pet insurance is highly recommended. There are many different policies available, so speak to your veterinary practice.
- It is still a legal requirement for dogs to have a collar and tag giving the owner's name and address. In addition, microchipping is recommended as a means of identification.
- If you are going away and cannot take your dog, boarding kennels can be booked a long time in advance. In addition, they will need to see an up to date vaccination record.
- Exercise is essential to your dog's well-being, both on and off-lead walking. How much exercise is required will depend on the type and size of dog you have, but one good walk every day is the minimum.
- Training is ongoing. You can teach an old dog new tricks, so investigate training classes in your locality – vets' practices, rescue centres and dog wardens will have details.

If you research carefully and make sure you are prepared and able to spend the time, money and energy on your new companion, you will reap the rewards. If, however, you have problems or need advice, organisations such as The Blue Cross, or the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors may be able to help.



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All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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Registered charity no: 224392