

Find a Dog to Match your Lifestyle

Unconditional, tail-wagging love -- there's a dog out there for you.

The single most important consideration in the process is this: take your time, do your homework, and find a dog that matches your lifestyle. Owning a dog is a very special experience and the reality is that you are adding a member to your family. A healthy dog can live for 12-15 years or more, so it is important for you and the dog that you give a lot of thought to this process.

Don't get a dog on impulse. Don't get a dog to be trendy. Trends come and go, but your dog will be with you for a long time. The stars of "101 Dalmatians" and "Snow Dogs" and "Beethoven" are wonderful dogs, but they aren't for everyone and they may not be the right dog for you or your family.

As you look, you'll probably see lots of puppies, but try to envision the dog as an adult. Every puppy is a cute ball of fluff, but you need to know what it will grow up to be. This, of course, is the essence of a purebred dog: predictability. You will know what that puppy will grow up to be.

Study the breed's history -- all breeds were developed to perform a specific function. If you know that purpose and the history of the breed, then you will have a good idea of its needs, its temperament and personality. You will be best prepared for a successful relationship.

Having a dog creates responsibilities. Be sure that you will have quality time to spend with the dog.

There are many resources to help you in your search. Start at the Westminster website, www.westminsterkennelclub.org. There you will find descriptions of each of the 162 breeds and varieties currently recognized by the American Kennel Club, and links to all the parent club web sites for those breeds.

Here are some other suggestions:

- a. Watch the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show on USA Network, held every February 9th and 10th on the USA network.
- b. Take a look at some of the many books, magazines, web sites and videos available everywhere.
- c. Consult with your local all breed club, boarding kennel, or veterinarian.
- d. Go to a dog show and visit with breeders and owners when they are not busy grooming or showing.

Find an Ethical, Responsible Breeder

Once you have decided what breed you want, or at least narrowed down the selection to a few, find an ethical, responsible breeder from the parent club website or at a dog show.

An ethical, responsible breeder breeds to improve the health of the breed, not just to create a product for re-sale. They know their stock, study pedigrees and do extensive health screening.

An ethical, responsible breeder is not afraid of or offended by your questions and in fact will have lots of questions for you. Responsible breeders want their dogs to be in good homes.

An ethical, responsible breeder will have an active history in shows or other competition, and should be involved in a club or rescue activities.

You should visit in person the facilities where the puppy was raised, as this will play a role in the future health and personality of the dog. You should also see at least one of the parents and some of the littermates.

An ethical, responsible breeder will provide a contract with health guarantees and will provide papers for you to register your dog. Remember, when you buy a dog from a breeder, you are also buying that breeder, too, someone who will be a valuable resource and a mentor for you for the life of the dog.

Be a Responsible Dog Owner

After you get your new dogs, remember this: there are no bad dogs, only bad owners. Have fun with your dog. Love your dog; include them in your life.

Know the laws for dogs where you live. License your dog, use permanent identification such as a tattoo or microchip, and don't let it run loose except in designated areas.

Practice good manners and dog owner etiquette: be respectful of your neighbors and their dogs. Clean up after your dog, and control barking and behavior issues. Take them to some basic training and help them be a responsible member of your family. A trained dog is a happy dog, and you'll be happy too.