



Maricopa County
Animal Care and Control

SELECTING THE FAMILY DOG



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 a dog when he is healthy and sick, in good times and bad, for as long as all shall live? Following are some questions family members should discuss before obtaining a dog, as well as where you can find the carefully chosen dog of your dreams.

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 injury. 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.

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. 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?

Most families these days are busy. Most adults go to work and the kids head off to school. One parent should be designated Primary Caretaker. During a dog's lifespan, your children will be growing in and out of various life stages and the family dog's importance in their lives may change.

WHICH DOG IS RIGHT FOR US?

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.

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.

Remember, the purchase price of a dog is a very small part of what the dog will actually cost. Money will be needed for food, grooming, chew toys, outerwear (if needed) 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. These surprises can cost \$500 or more. Unlike our children, most of our dogs are not covered by health insurance.

HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE?

How much time and energy can you spend on a new dog? Various breeds and ages of dog make different demands on our 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 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.

For more information on animal care, behavior or MCACC programs, contact
(602) 506-PETS or visit pets.maricopa.gov

WHERE TO GET THE DOG OF YOUR DREAMS

Where you go to get the family dog depends on whether you have decided on a purebred or a mixed breed dog. If knowing what size, shape, and general temperament your puppy is going to be when he grows up is important to you or you wish to compete in American or United Kennel Club dog activities, then getting a purebred would be right for you. If a one-of-a-kind look and a loving personality combined with the warm glow you get from "saving" a dog is more important, then a mixed breed would be right up your alley. The following are eight avenues to pursue to obtain a dog.

LOCAL HUMANE SOCIETIES/SPCAs/ ANIMAL SHELTERS

Most shelters offer adoption programs and are staffed with trained counselors experienced in matching families with suitable companions. Most animals have been screened for major health and temperament problems. Many shelters offer additional free services such as training materials, shots, initial check-up, and spay/neuter surgery. Both pure and mixed breed dogs can be found in shelters. For a list of shelters in your area, check your Yellow Pages under "Animal Shelters."

REPUTABLE BREEDERS

For those searching for a sound, purebred puppy, a reputable breeder is the answer. This person specializes in only one or two breeds of dog, has been linked with this particular breed for at least five years, is a member in good standing of his/her national breed club, and will usually take back the dog if for some reason it does not work out. They can discuss the pros and cons of this breed with you in depth. They will screen you vigorously for they feel totally responsible for the puppies they bring into this world.

PUREBRED RESCUE GROUP

With the substantial number of purebred dogs being turned in at shelters, many breed organizations have started rescue networks. Here, people with knowledge of a particular breed either rescue a dog turned in to a shelter or they send someone from their waiting list to adopt the dog from the shelter. Rescue groups can be found by contacting the national breed club or your local animal shelter.

RESCUING A STRAY OFF THE STREET

Taking in a stray is taking in an unknown entity—no history and no safety net. It can work for some people, especially if the timing is right and you were looking for a dog of this type anyway. Often times, there are medical and temperament problems that are not solvable without considerable time and expense.

NEWSPAPER ADS/SIGNS IN GROCERY STORES AND THE LIKE

If someone is giving away his dog for an acceptable reason, obtaining a dog this way can be advantageous. You have a chance to speak with the former owner, find out the dogs routine and habits, and have a chance to see the dog in a relatively no stressful environment. However, many people find they have created dogs whose habits they cannot live with; yet they still love those dogs and want to see them in a home -- just not their home.

PET SHOPS

Most pet shops deal only in purebred puppies. These dogs are usually purchased from puppy mills or big scale commercial breeders. These puppies are not brought up in a healthy home environment, nor are they well-socialized and stimulated to the world around them. Pet shops thrive primarily because of two segments of society: (1) the impulse buyer and (2) the person who is averse to a screening process.

BACKYARD BREEDERS

These are those "savvy" economists who believe that because they purchased a dog, this dog should earn back its purchase price by producing puppies or generating big stud fees. It is not suggested to get a dog this way.

COMMERCIAL BREEDERS

Whether they are Midwest puppy mill farms or one-breed kennels so big that they always have puppies for sale, they are commercial breeders and that's not the kind of start in life you want for your special family companion. The high volume of these operations does not provide for the close daily examination a new pup deserves.

America has become a nation of disposable pet owners. Doesn't your family dog deserve better? Choose wisely, for when the bond breaks, everybody suffers. Make selecting your new family dog a life-affirming act.