

Dogged Decisions

Make Sure You Choose the Right Dog to Complement Your Lifestyle and Budget

Whether you are a singleton looking for an animal to keep you company after a grueling day at the office or a parent who has finally decided to throw the kids a bone by getting the family a four-legged friend, selecting the right dog is an important decision not to be taken lightly. Breed characteristics, pooch size, and budget should all be considered when choosing a dog compatible with your lifestyle.

Although recent studies in the United States have revealed that pet owners are healthier and happier, make sure you have the time and energy to devote to a dog before choosing the pick of the litter. Although family members may promise to help, they will often lose interest in the daily and necessary routine unless it is



companionhip — it is not fair to leave your dog alone in the basement or outside in the backyard 24/7. Puppies require even more attention for daily playtime and exercise, and for the first eight months you must adhere to a rigorous housebreaking schedule. Adopting an adult dog from an animal shelter or rescue group will not necessarily absolve you from a little extra TLC to ensure a smooth transition into your home.

so choose wisely. Descriptions of breed temperament can be double-edged swords, so it is worth taking time to read between the lines.

The standard poodle, regarded as a highly intelligent dog, can become difficult to handle in unskilled hands. Labrador retrievers, gentle and loving animals, are prone to jumping, which can frighten small children. The friendly and sociable Pembroke Welsh Corgi often nips at the heels of visitors.

Your due diligence will also make you aware of potential breed health problems. Dalmatians can often be found languishing at shelters: Besides their being a bit high maintenance as puppies, deafness is a problem common to the breed. Dogs who don't respond to regular voice commands can get dumped under the assumption that they have a behavioral problem rather than a physical one. Special training would help these dogs become fantastic pets, or purchasing them from a reputable breeder would guarantee no such surprise discoveries.

Although some health problems are unavoidable, the growth size of a dog can generally be estimated ahead of time

— and should be. In addition to the dimensions of your living space, consider the weight, height, and physical condition of you and your family members. A Papillon might not be appropriate for a family with active children, nor would an adolescent Brittany spaniel who loves to run be ideal for an elderly senior.

Select a dog that you can handle and can be comfortable with in your home environment, and if you believe that's a large dog in a small apartment, suit your handling skills and exercise schedule accordingly.

Most important, before bringing an adorable puppy or handsome adult dog home, make sure you can afford it.

The cost of a purebred typically runs from \$300 to many thousands, while adopting a shelter animal costs around \$40 to \$250. Owning a dog can be an 8-to-15 year commitment, so any choice is going to lighten your wallet over the

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course of time no matter what the breed.

According to the 2003-2004 American Pet Products Manufacturers Association National Pet Owners Survey, the greatest expense for pet owners over a 12-month period is veterinary care services, followed by food and then supplies. The extent to which you splurge on toys, leashes, and bedding can be controlled, but there's no skimping on health care and daily provisions, so understand that a dog will be an expensive addition to your family.

Other costs that should not be overlooked include grooming, boarding, and obedience training services. Depending on the type of canine and its coat, a professional grooming session every four to six weeks might be a necessity, as will sacking away extra doggie dollars for a boarding kennel or pet-sitter to keep your pooch company while you are away on vacation. Finally, taking an obedience class or purchasing dog-training books or videos is a recommended investment to ensure your dog will become and *stay* a loving partner for years to come. ■

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Riverside Park Run: City dogs need to get out and around for playtime and exercise

their responsibility. If you're the leader of your family pack, the dog will likely come to depend on you too.

Dogs are social creatures, so your first duty will be to provide it with

Although few dogs actually "work" for a living, they still maintain characteristics as companions, herders, ratters, guardians, or hunters that were bred into them over hundreds of years,