



Choosing the Right Dog for You

There is no happier time than welcoming a new puppy into your family. Despite all the puddles, late nights and chewed slippers, one lick from that adorable face and its all worth it. Why is it, then, that every year hundreds of puppies are turned over to rescue societies because they “just didn’t work out”? While some of the blame must be put on not being truly able to care for a dog, or poor training from the start, I suspect a much greater proportion of these dogs are surrendered because not enough care and thought was put into picking an appropriate breed.

Fashion can be a big influence on a potential dog owner’s choice. The Labrador Retriever is currently the most popular dog in the UK, and they are wonderful, active and intelligent dogs. They do, however, require a large amount of exercise to keep them occupied and out of trouble, and are mentally puppies for the first 2 years of life – meaning your neighbour’s sedate and obedient adult Labrador is not a good representation of what your new lab puppy will be like – at least for several years! Similarly, the size or shape of a breed does not necessarily correlate well with its temperament or lifestyle. The Jack Russell Terrier for example is a compact, endearing little dog, but is also one of the most active and tenacious of all dog breeds – definitely not a good choice for a flat dweller or as a companion for a quiet senior! Popular breeds also inevitably become victim to supply and demand – too many puppies are bred to supply the demand and genetic problems become prominent, ranging from hip and other orthopaedic issues to severe temperament problems – a terrible thing considering it is often the temperament of the breed that made it popular in the first place!

The answer to this problem is simple – do a bit of research before choosing a dog breed – and have an open mind. The romantic notion of walking in the heath with a dashing Springer Spaniel at your side may not fit with the reality of that breed’s daily needs, or the dog’s ability to meet your needs as a pet owner. The best way to get an idea of what a breed’s behavior will be like is to think about what they were originally bred to do. Herding breeds will likely be high-energy and very driven, but also highly intelligent and trainable. Dogs bred to guard or fight may have an aggressive tendency, but will likely be very loyal. There are lots of resources available to you to help with this decision. Dog shows give you lots of choices to consider, and the opportunity to discuss breeds with the breeders, handlers and breed club representatives. Your vet deals with members of

hundreds of breeds on a daily basis and will be happy to give you advice regarding good choices, and may point out breeds you may not have considered (or even heard of!). Rescue centres often have dogs of mixed parentage, but it is usually not difficult to determine at least some of the breeds in the mix, and the staff can usually give a great deal of information on the pup's likely temperament and needs. There are also many excellent books listing the hundreds of dog breeds available. Finally, once you have narrowed down your selection to a breed or two, meet with several breeders to familiarize yourself with these dogs before you make your final decision.

Taking on a dog is a big commitment that starts a relationship that can last more than a decade. It's well worth putting the time and effort into making the perfect choice for you and your family to ensure a long, happy and rewarding life with your new best friend.

Colleen Bray BSc DVM MRCVS is a veterinary surgeon at Midforest Veterinary Practice in Lyndhurst, and is thrilled to be providing veterinary services for the New Forest community. She is Canadian, and trained at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, Ontario. She is married, and currently owned by her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, three cats, the practice ferret and a Haflinger pony