

Puppies are lovely but can be a lot of really hard work. Be prepared for months of disruption, chaos and mess - puppies really aren't for the seriously house proud!

Owning a puppy can be a real joy but it's also quite a serious responsibility to lay the correct groundwork, so that you end up with the dog of your dreams.

What type of puppy should I choose?

- It is essential for you to choose a breed which will best suit your circumstances.
- Why not consider adopting a rescue dog or puppy? Please remember that many of the rescue organisations, such as Dogs Trust, often have stray or abandoned puppies in need of loving homes. For more information contact your local Rehoming Centre, or call 020 7837 0006.
- Research the different breeds by reading books and gain as much information as possible before making your choice.
- Think about your lifestyle, size of home, facilities for exercise and time available.
- Speak to other dog owners for their advice and experiences.
- Should you choose to adopt a pedigree, meet dogs of all ages and both sexes of that breed. This will give you an idea of what to expect.
- Consider both the physical and mental needs of the breed you have chosen.

What makes a good breeder?

Dog breeding is a very specialised area. This is why it is so important for you to go to a reputable breeder when choosing a puppy. Good breeders will carefully choose a brood bitch or stud dog on the basis of quality relating to the breed standard, breed lines (ancestors and genetics) and compatibility.

A good breeder will:

- Not breed from a bitch on two consecutive seasons.
- Only allow their bitches to have three to four litters during the bitch's breeding life.
- Ensure their dogs have a good quality of life such as a balanced diet/housing/exercise/socialisation/veterinary care when necessary.
- Not sell any dog to a commercial wholesaler, pet shop, dealer or other retail outlet.
- Not breed from a bitch under two years of age or over eight years of age.
- Not breed from a dog or bitch that is likely to pass on any hereditary problems to future generations of puppies (research of your chosen breed may alert you to some of these hereditary disorders such as Hip Dysplasia).
- Be knowledgeable about their breed and will always advise you on any queries you may have.
- Offer to take the puppy back should your initial circumstances change.
- Be keen to follow up their puppy's progress in its new home, want to know as much about you and what type of home their puppy is going to, as you will want to know about them.

What if I decide to buy a pedigree?

Dogs Trust recommends that you:

- Avoid buying from a pet shop/other retail outlet or through a newspaper advertisement offering a wide range of breeds. It is possible that these puppies may have come from puppy farms; they may have been bred indiscriminately, putting profit before the dogs' welfare.

- When you have made your choice of breed, contact either your local rescue centre or the breed club secretary of the breed you have chosen. Breed Club details can be obtained through the Kennel Club 0870 6066750.
- Be prepared to put your name on a waiting list for a litter to be born. A WELL BRED PUPPY IS WORTH WAITING FOR. In the meantime, ask if you can visit the parents to give you an idea of what the dog will be like as an adult.
- INSIST on seeing the mother interacting with the puppies and if possible, meet the father.
- You should have easy access to the puppies and be able to handle them. Do not allow the breeder to show you just one puppy.
- Make at least two visits to the breeder to view the puppies before the final collection.
- If you are unsure about buying the right puppy, make enquiries with the local vet to see if he would be willing to attend the viewing to check the puppy for any visible health problems - this could save money and upset in the long term.
- Request a written agreement that purchase is subject to a satisfactory examination by your veterinary surgeon within 48 hours of purchase.
- Check that the puppies have regular access to human contact, ideally with more than one person. It is better if the puppies are being raised in a home environment rather than in a kennel, as this will help them get used to the everyday sights and sounds of the home.
- Check that the facilities are clean and that the puppies appear alert and healthy.
- Ensure all the relevant paperwork is available for inspection WHEN YOU VISIT THE PUPPY. This will include: the pedigree and registration papers, hereditary screening certificates of the parents (for example, hereditary eye disease or hip dysplasia if appropriate to the breed).
- Check to see if the puppy has been regularly wormed and vaccinated. Some breeders will have the puppy vaccinated at eight weeks of age before releasing it to its new home.
- Remember a Kennel Club registration/pedigree does not guarantee a perfect puppy. It is up to you to carry out the appropriate checks.
- Ask if the puppy will be covered by insurance for any illness during the first six weeks in your care (most good breeders subscribe to this scheme).
- Ask the breeder if they would be willing to take the puppy back, should your initial circumstances change (for example if you discover you are allergic to the dog). Get written confirmation of this.
- Ask the breeder questions about the puppy's feeding regime. Good breeders will supply you with a diet plan.
- Expect to have to pay a deposit on choosing your puppy.
- Choose a puppy that is interested in you, not the one that cowers in the corner.
- Check the puppy has no discharge from its eyes or nose and that there are no sores, bald patches or scabs on the skin.
- Make sure that the puppy is alert and responsive to sounds and is showing no obvious signs of illness, such as coughing.
- If a puppy appears unwell on collection, DO NOT take it - arrange with the breeder to return another day. If you have any doubts, choose another breeder.

Please remember these are only guidelines. There may be some variation between individual breeders. The time you spend choosing your puppy will be an investment for a long and happy relationship between you and your dog.

Caring for your new puppy

Once you have chosen your puppy, it is important for you to make plans for his transition to your home. This will help reduce any extra stress caused by his new surroundings and give him the best start in his new life. Here are some basic guidelines for you to follow.

Preparation:

- Decide on a name for your new puppy. This will be one of the first things he will learn.
- Decide where your new puppy is going to sleep and have a suitable bed ready with a blanket or an old jumper. Many people choose to place the bed in the kitchen, where the floor is easy to clean and the area is free from draughts.
- However, many puppies struggle to cope with separation from their mum and littermates, and are much happier sleeping with humans in their bedroom (in an indoor kennel if necessary) until they are older. They can be gradually moved onto the landing and/or downstairs if preferred.
- Ensure you have all the necessary equipment such as a feeding bowl, a water bowl, newspaper, a couple of safe toys, suitable grooming equipment for the coat type, a lead, collar and name tag, and a supply of food he is used to (ask the breeder or Rehoming Centre beforehand).
- Ensure the home environment is safe. 'Puppy proofing' is wise to avoid any unnecessary accidents. Remove anything that you would not wish to be chewed, particularly electrical flexes and also ensure that garden fencing and gates are secure.

The puppy's first days:

- When you collect the puppy, it is best for two people to make the journey so that someone can hold the puppy in the car. It may be a good idea to take some newspaper in case he is travel sick.
- If you have bought a puppy from a breeder, make sure that you get all the relevant paperwork - such as the Kennel Club registration forms, pedigree certificate, dietary advice sheet, worming and vaccination details - at the time of collection.
- If your puppy has come from a Rehoming Centre, ensure that you listen carefully to any instructions given by the staff. If your puppy has already been vaccinated you should receive a certificate, as well as details relating to any medical treatment that he may have received. You should also receive literature relating to feeding, basic training techniques and advice regarding future health care. Most Rehoming Centres will be happy to give follow up advice and support, should you require it.
- For the children in the family, this will be a very exciting time. It should be explained that the puppy is not a toy and that he needs to sleep undisturbed. This is a good opportunity to teach your children about responsible dog ownership.

Training:

- Obtain a book which can assist you with basic training techniques or read our Basic Dog Training, Socialisation and Housetraining factsheets.
- The puppy is bound to feel confused at first. Be gentle and kind and allow him time to settle in his new surroundings. Introduce him to the areas of the house where he is allowed to go and show him where his bed and bowls are located.
- Make enquiries with your local vet about reputable puppy socialisation and training classes. Visit the class to ensure it will suit both you and your new puppy. Remember a good class will get booked up quickly, so you may need to register in advance. Some classes will take puppies after their first vaccination.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE TRAINING METHODS EMPLOYED AND ADVISED ARE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF KINDNESS AND FAIRNESS

- Training your puppy should start straight away to avoid him developing bad habits. Teach him what is acceptable. Make clear and simple commands and show him what you want him to do. Lessons should be short and at regular intervals. Remember - always reward good behaviour, and ignore 'bad' behaviour.
- Play is essential and can be used to reward good behaviour. It will also give you the opportunity to build a good relationship with your dog.
- Most puppies are anxious to please; therefore rewarding good behaviour is far more effective than punishing him for a poor performance.
- If you don't have an older dog in the home, try to find friends or family with a friendly, calm dog and let them have time together to play and interact on a regular basis. All puppies and dogs need frequent, safe interaction with other dogs to stay happy and healthy and learn normal dog behaviour.
- To housetrain quickly, you will need to take your puppy outside hourly. Puppies have very weak bladder control and will need to relieve themselves regularly throughout the day. There is a fairly set pattern to this: immediately after waking, after exercise or play and after each meal. Always choose the same place in the garden. Remain with the puppy until he has performed and then give him plenty of generous praise. It is essential that he links the chosen area in the garden with reward. Remember accidents will happen. If you catch your puppy in the act, simply take him outside and then praise him for his efforts. Never shout or hit the puppy as this will cause confusion and is likely to make matters worse.
- Place a suitable collar on your puppy and allow him time to get used to it. Remember to fasten it up tight enough, so that he cannot pull it over his head, but remember to make adjustments as he grows. Attach the lead and gently encourage the puppy to follow you, using praise. If he struggles hold the lead until he realises that there is no escape, then gently coax him to move forward again.

Healthcare:

- Register your puppy with a local vet and have him checked over as soon as possible - don't wait for an emergency.
- Routine healthcare is very important and should begin when your puppy is young and be maintained throughout his lifetime.
- Should your new puppy show any signs of illness, ensure you seek early veterinary advice.
- Make enquiries regarding pet insurance. Veterinary treatment can be expensive, particularly when you least expect it. Most rehoming organisations and good breeders subscribe to an insurance scheme, which offer six weeks free insurance cover for the puppy in his new home, but it is up to you to renew the policy after this time.
- If your puppy is not vaccinated ask your vet's advice as to the best age for the puppy to start the course. If possible, allow your puppy a week to settle in before making the appointment.
- It is also important to maintain a strict worming and flea treatment regime, particularly during the puppy's first year. Your vet will advise you with regard to what preparations he will need and how often they should be used.

- It is important for you to accustom your puppy to being examined regularly. Gently and regularly check his entire body including his ears, mouth, eyes, and paws. This will allow you to check your pet's general health and also make it easier should you need to administer any veterinary treatment that may be necessary in the future.
- Ask the breeder or Rehoming Centre staff about coat care and grooming equipment for the particular breed. Not only is regular grooming beneficial to the dog, it also helps build a good relationship between the two of you. Train the puppy to stand quietly and reassure him throughout the procedure. Try to make this an enjoyable experience for the puppy and remember to give plenty of praise and rewards for good behaviour.
- Only bath your puppy if necessary. This should be done with warm water and a mild shampoo. How often your puppy should be bathed, will depend on the breed and coat type.
- By eight weeks of age, your puppy will have a complete set of temporary teeth. Between the ages of three and six months the puppy will shed its baby teeth to allow for the adult teeth to come through. Dental care should start as soon as possible. Toothbrushing, when done regularly, is the most effective way of removing plaque from your dog's teeth and keeping the gums healthy. You may find that your puppy will want to chew everything. Try to avoid leaving any objects lying around that you would not want to be chewed. Provide the puppy with his own safe chew toys.

Feeding and Exercise:

- Feed your puppy at regular intervals (at least four times) throughout the day. Some puppies may develop an upset stomach during the first few days in a new home. Stick with a diet that the puppy is used to and avoid offering a variety of rich foods or overfeeding during these early days.
- It is essential that your puppy is provided with a carefully balanced diet containing high quality ingredients. The amount each puppy needs will vary with age, size, breed and activity levels. Ask your vet for advice on which diet will suit your puppy.
- Your puppy will receive all the exercise he needs in the house and garden during the first few weeks. Over-exercise at an early age, particularly in some larger breeds, can lead to problems with bone development, if extra care is not taken.
- Just like a new baby, your puppy will need plenty of rest and sleep during the early stages. The new puppy should be encouraged to rest regularly. It is also important for your puppy to gradually learn to spend short periods of time alone, so that he doesn't develop separation problems as he gets older. If you have another dog, or a friendly cat in the home, who will be around when you're not there, encourage them to bond as this makes it much easier for your puppy to cope.
- Avoid letting your puppy climb the stairs or furniture and any other strenuous activity that may cause injury.

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