5 things to ask yourself before getting a puppy

Puppies are cute and snuggly – so full of joy. And it may be very tempting to choose to make a puppy your next family member. The truth is that puppies are a lot of work, and you shouldn't make the decision lightly.

Here are five questions to answer before bringing a puppy into your home:

1. **Do you have time for a puppy?** This is an extremely important question to ask yourself as puppies are time consuming. If you are gone for long periods of time, a young pup is not the best choice. Feeding, potty breaks and training sessions are all important for your baby's well being. This all takes time out of an already busy schedule. (A puppy should not be crated more than one hour X the puppy's age in months – e.g., 3 hours for a 3 month old puppy.)
2. **Can I afford a puppy?** It's a simple truth that all puppies cost money. When I hear the statement, "I got a free puppy", I cringe. There is no such thing as a free puppy! Puppies and all dogs need appropriate vet care, food, toys, and in a lot of cases you will have to pay a pet deposit. These are just a few of their basic needs and when you bring a new furry friend into our homes, you accept the associated responsibilities and expenses.
3. **What type of puppy suits my lifestyle?** A new pup should always fit your lifestyle. A athlete would do better with a pup that is active and will be ready at a moments

notice to run, jump and play with its owner. If your idea of exercise is kicking back, watching a movie and flipping burgers on your grill, choose a calmer breed that needs less exercise and can be content curled up against you eating popcorn and catching the latest flick. You also need to find out which breeds are allowed by your landlord and/or homeowners insurance. Some breeds are excluded from certain areas, so check out your options carefully.

4. **What age puppy would be best?** This should be a major consideration as the younger the puppy the bigger the investment. If you are short on both patience and time, consider finding an older pup or even a young dog. Do not forget our many senior dogs just waiting for the perfect family to share their golden years with. There are many dogs at shelters or in foster care that are already potty trained and have good house manners.
5. **Are you ready for a 10 to 15 year commitment?** Dogs are for life. Before bringing home a new friend consider what you would do if you have a lifestyle change (e.g., moving, having a baby, allergies, financial strain). In these hard economic times the shelters are bursting at the seams, and it is important to consider what would happen to your new friend if you circumstances changed.

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5 places to avoid when purchasing a new pet

It’s pretty hard to resist a cute, adorable, cuddly puppy. And it’s easy to get caught up in the gratification of finding a puppy and taking it home immediately. Maybe you’ve found a great deal on a pure breed puppy or a puppy with all the right traits and characteristics. (Possibly the puppies are just to darn cute to pass up.)

We’re not saying that all puppies acquired at the places below will be somehow inferior or defective. We do know that these puppy sources are much more risky for both you and your potential puppy than working with a reputable breeder, dog owner or rescue group.

1. **Pet Stores.** The majority of these pups come from puppy mill breeders. Every time a puppy mill puppy is purchased, it grows the puppy mill “industry”. As long as there is money to be made, there are people that will be happy to keep breeding regardless of the suffering they cause to innocent pets. Reputable pet stores offer adoption days to local rescue groups and shelters these are the places that we want to support.
2. **Back yard breeders & newspaper ads.** Over the last 10 years, more people that see their dogs as an extra source of income rather than valued members of the family. I am not referring to the couple that want a puppy from their dog to carry on the legacy or the family that does not realize the benefits of altering their pets. Although this is never a good idea. The problem arises when someone purchases a pup and thinks “wow I can recoup my money by having pups of my own”. Many times these dogs are left in the backyard with little or no interaction and bred every season and left to drop their puppies in the garage or under the house.

These owners do not realize the importance of medical care, proper shelter and socialization which can result in heartbreak for a new owner.

3. **Flea markets.** Flea markets are never a good place to find your new best friend. Again we must think about where the puppies come from and how they had the great misfortune of becoming just another commodity. The transient nature of flea markets may also make it difficult for you to contact the seller if you encounter health issues with your new puppy. They have your money; you have a puppy.
4. **Side of the road.** On an impulse you stop and purchase a cute cuddly puppy. You have no way of knowing where these pups come from. Most likely come from a backyard breeder or puppy mill environment. Again, you probably won't be able to contact the seller again. Balance the risk with your investment.
5. **The Internet.** This is always a buyer beware situation. There are many online scams that show adorable puppies for sale or adoption, and they come with high costs both financially and emotionally.

By being risk averse and approaching these puppy sellers with caution, you may be avoiding potentially expensive health and behavioral issues. You and your puppy benefit greatly from knowing more about your puppy's health care, potential issues and personality before you bring him home. Verify references. Meet the puppy's parents. Ensure the puppy is healthy.

As always, there are exceptions to any rule.

- If you see that cute pup on the side of the road do not buy buy on a whim. Ask to meet the parents, see if they welcome you to drop in and actually see where the pups were raised. They may very well be just individuals with a random litter that raise their dogs as as a true family member. But the majority of the time you will discover otherwise.

This does not mean that they should not be breeding puppies, it just means that they are unaware of the impact extra puppies add to the overpopulation problem that exists.

- The Internet can be a valuable asset in your search for a new friend. There are many legitimate sites that can help you locate reputable breeders in your area. Other valuable Internet resources include the sites www.petfinder.com and www.adoptapet.com. Research multiple rescue organizations and shelters in your area to see what dogs are available. They can help you locate adoptable dogs both mixed and pure bred.

Dogs are a ten to fifteen year commitment. This is not a decision to be taken lightly. It is worth the effort to take your time and do your homework. Choose your next puppy from a rescue organization or shelter. If you feel that you must purchase a puppy rather than rescue, then take the time to research your area for a reputable breeder.

Characteristics of a reputable breeder

So, you've chosen to go the pure bred puppy route. Choosing your breeder is as important as choosing your breed and even as important as which puppy you select from a litter. Puppies from irresponsible breeders can suffer from genetic abnormalities and may even arrive at your home with potentially fatal illnesses.

The good news is that it isn’t hard to find out if a breeder is reputable. Here are six things to consider:

1. A reputable breeder will welcome you into their kennel area and be more than happy for you to see where their puppies are kept. Puppies kept in unsanitary conditions are a health issue waiting to happen. If the litter you are considering is displayed in an outdoor pen, this is probably not where the litter “lives”. Ask for a tour of the entire facility.
2. A reputable breeder will be happy to introduce you to both parents. This is important as parents with bad temperaments can produce puppies with the same problems. Poor temperament can be caused by lack of socialization, but genetics plays a big part.
3. Avoid places that have many multiple breeds. It takes a lot of energy, time and staff to run a proper kennel. Most of these establishments raise puppies to sell not for the betterment of the breed. They are in the business of making money.
4. Research the type dog you are interested in, and check out health issues that are prevalent in the breed. A reputable breeder will discuss this openly with you and will have had the proper tests done on your puppy’s parents. This step determines two things: the knowledge the breeder has about the breed and the quality control processes used to ensure healthy litters.
5. Find out how long the breeder has been in operation, and ask for references. Anyone that has raised dogs for any amount of time should be able to provide you with a list of satisfied dog owners. Check the references and ask about health and behavioral issues with the purchased animals. (Don’t focus only on the buying experience.)

To insure the health of your new friend take them into a reputable veterinarian within 3 days for a health checkup.