

So, You're Thinking of Getting a Puppy!

So, you're thinking of getting a puppy – it's a big decision and not one any of us should take too lightly.

It was almost 30 years before I got another dog, as I wanted to wait until I no longer worked full time – a personal choice, but one that needs to be taken into consideration, along with many other factors.

I had owned dogs in the past, but before buying my two pups this year I did a lot of research into breeds, breeders, costs involved, legal requirements, time commitment, training classes etc, etc.

The first question we should ask ourselves is – “Why do I want a dog”? Is it because the children have been pleading with you, or perhaps you saw a fluffy little bundle and thought I must have one of those! Motivation is important as you will be taking on a long term commitment – 12-15 years, or perhaps even longer.

The next thing you should consider is the cost involved in owning a dog, it can be substantial and something you might not realise until it's too late - when you have acquired your pup and realise you just can't afford its upkeep. The upfront costs are ones for which you have probably budgeted – the cost of the dog (which can be considerable, depending on the breed), neutering/spaying, micro-chipping and initial equipment required (lead, collar, bowls, bedding etc), however that's just the start of the financial commitment. The ongoing costs also add up – food, chews, treats, toys, veterinary bills, grooming, pet insurance, worming, flea treatment, training classes, annual vaccinations, kennelling costs (if you need to leave your pet for any length of time), – the list goes on.

Once you are sure that you are able to offer a puppy a home, there are other factors you must weigh up when deciding on the type of dog – what sort of time commitment will be required (playing, exercising, training, grooming), how much space you have (do you live in a flat or house, do you have a garden) and are there children in the family and/or other pets in the house. These factors should determine the type of breed suitable for you, your family and your particular circumstances.

When deciding on the breed you should think about size, amount of food, exercise and grooming required and research breed characteristics/temperament and any health issues relating to the breed (eg eye or hip problems). If possible meet an adult dog of the same breed so you have a rough idea of how large your pup will grow. I decided on the Cockapoo (cross cocker spaniel/poodle) as I had previously owned a Cockapoo and felt that this particular breed suited my personal circumstances. However I decided on two pups and six months ago bought two male littermates Zack and Jake. You may think this is a good idea as the two pups can keep each other company but I have discovered since I bought “the boys” (from personal experience and research undertaken) that two littermates is not a good idea and experienced breeders probably would not allow you to buy littermates. Two dogs off the same litter may bond very tightly and exclude you or they may take a dislike to each other and you may be forced to rehome one of them. If you decide you want more than one dog, buy one, bond with it, train it, have it neutered and then buy the second one.



Zack and Jake at 6 weeks when I visited them at the breeder

Now you have decided on the breed, you need to find a reputable and experienced breeder; the best way to do this is probably through personal recommendation. As this isn't always possible you must be very careful in selecting a breeder. Avoid breeders who deal in multiple breeds, they should specialise, ideally, in no more than one or two breeds. Always visit the breeder to see the puppies with their mother (it is unlikely that you will see the father as the stud is often owned by someone else). Make sure the mother appears healthy and has a good temperament and that the pups also look healthy. Don't buy a puppy sight unseen, or from a breeder who offers to deliver the pup to you. I bought Zack and Jake from a breeder in Liverpool and made the round trip from Glasgow twice. You shouldn't be offended if the breeder asks you lots of questions – a good breeder will want to make sure that their pups are going to good homes, and will want to vet you as much as you want to vet them! You can also ask for references from previous owners, some of whom will allow you to contact them directly. Beware of terms such as 'Kennel Club Registered', this does not mean the Kennel Club have inspected the premises or the puppies. Also research any other initials of organisations the breeder offers. If you have seen your puppy advertised in a newspaper, always question why the breeder needs to advertise this way? The best breeders have long waiting lists for pups and their clients are usually recommended to them by word or mouth.

Be wary if pups are being raised in kennels or other outhouses as they are missing out on the socialisation they get from being raised in a house within a family situation. If you are concerned by the health of the pups or the conditions in which the dogs are housed **DO NOT BUY THE PUPPY**, instead report your concerns to the SSPCA. In order for the SSPCA to conduct an investigation they need to see the puppy in situ.

Educate yourself on the perils of puppy farming, there is plenty of information on the internet and you may find leaflets produced by the Dogs Trust particularly helpful.

Your new puppy should leave the breeder between 7 and 8 weeks of age beware breeders who ask you to take pups away from 5 weeks and those who wish to hold on to pups until they are fully vaccinated. Visit our Dog Training pages to find out why this early period of social development is so important and why they should be spending it in their new home with their new family. Your puppy may be wormed and may have had a vaccination but not always. If the breeder says the puppy has received either of these treatments you need documentary evidence of this from your breeder's vet to pass on to your vet. You should also get details of the pup's diet, beware that many breeders have very little knowledge of canine nutrition, Taylor's vets or pet behaviour therapist can advise you if you feel your puppies food is not suitable. Many breeders will arrange some free insurance for your new pup, beware that you have to activate this for your cover to start. If your vet does not offer you this Taylors vets can arrange you 4 weeks free insurance with Pet Plan whilst you make up mind which insurance policy will suit you best. Make sure you also get the appropriate pedigree paperwork and that you have a signed contract with the breeder in the event you have problems with the puppy once you take it home, a good breeder will always take their puppy back if things go wrong. I always take a new pet to my own vet to be checked over as soon as possible.

Never let your heart rule your head and buy a puppy because you feel sorry for it – you will be storing up problems for the future both financial and emotional.

To sum up, ensure you:-

really want a dog for the right reasons;

choose a breed that suits your personal circumstances (time, finance, space);

choose a reputable breeder and make sure that you see the mother and the pups at the breeder's home.

I would just like to add that it's well worth doing your homework as you will have years of pleasure, rather than good intentions going wrong and yet another dog ending up in a rescue centre looking for a new home.

This article was written by Clare McDougall.