



# PET TALK

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## CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOG FOR YOUR FAMILY\*

According to the Humane Society of the United States, between six and eight million dogs and cats enter a shelter each year and between three and four million are euthanized each year. A fertile dog can have two litters of puppies a year and have 6-10 puppies in each litter. Combine uncontrolled breeding with too few good homes and you end up with over crowded shelters which can increase the numbers of animals euthanized in many instances.

One big reason that these animals end up in shelters is that the pet was not chosen correctly by the owner based on their lifestyle and animal experience. There are many factors to consider when choosing a pet. The following are questions that everyone considering dog ownership should answer before making their decision. This kind of forethought is very beneficial for both owner and dog.

- Where do you live? How much space do you have for a dog?
- How much attention can you give the dog?
- What is the activity level of the dog and does this match your lifestyle?
- Are there allergies in your family that must be addressed?
- Should you get a purebred dog or a mixed breed?
- What is your commitment level to the dog?

Now that you have answered the questions and decided that a dog is the right pet for you, which breed do

you select? There are lots of online resources that offer questionnaires to help you select a breed that is right for you, such as Pet Net, Selecting a Dog, and Dog Decision Guide, ([www.wonderpuppy.net/1choose.php](http://www.wonderpuppy.net/1choose.php)), just to name a few. Also, the following are some general guidelines that will give you insight into whether or not a particular breed might be appropriate for your household.

Whether or not a dog should be large or small can depend on several factors other than personal preference, including where you live. Do you live in an apartment or a house? Is your residence located in a large city or in a rural area? Do you have a fenced yard or no yard at all? As far as size is concerned, small breeds are generally well suited to apartment living. Dogs such as Toy Poodles, Chihuahuas and Yorkshire Terriers can make excellent choices for small homes or apartments. However, if barking is going to bother your neighbors, then small breeds like the Beagle or the Bichon Frise might not be the right choice for apartment dwellers since both of these breeds tend to be very vocal.

Activity level and temperament vary in dogs as much as they do in people. If you spend a lot of time outdoors, then you should consider a breed that can tolerate the weather conditions in your area. Dogs with long-hair or double coats might not be the best choices if you live in southern Louisiana but would be

wonderful for someone who lives in the Midwest or northern states. These dog's coats would offer them protection from the cold winters that these areas experience. If you are a couch potato, then you should probably not choose a dog that requires a significant amount of exercise such as an Irish Setter or an extremely active dog such as a Jack Russell Terrier.

If you have small children or simply prefer a very calm dog, then breeds like the Pit Bull, Rottweiler or Doberman, who are better suited for protection purposes, might not be good choices. But certain breeds, like the Saint Bernard, who sleeps 16-18 hours a day would be a good choice for someone wanting a companion who will not require a lot of interaction and is very good with children.

If you or someone in your family has allergies, then a short haired dog

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would be a better choice than a long-haired breed. In addition, Poodles are a breed that most people find cause fewer allergic reactions than other breeds.

Should you get a purebred dog or a dog from the “Heinz 57” breed? For some people, a pure-bred is the only way to go. This family had a Weimaraner while they were growing up and this is the only breed they will consider. Also, there are some people who contend that the extra money spent up front on the purchase of a pure-bred dog will lower costs over the life of the dog. The theory behind this is that the “good” breeding will lessen the likelihood of certain diseases and health problems. Un-

fortunately, the emphasis here must be on “good” breeding. If you buy a purebred dog, check out the breeder’s reputation. Breeding within a blood line could actually cause more problems for the pet owner than they would have experienced with a mixed breed dog. In addition, sometimes breeds are mixed to try to get the more desirable traits from each breed. However, if all you are looking for is a companion, then just about any breed, or mixture of breeds, will suit you fine.

Since shelters are so overcrowded, starting your search here is an excellent choice. You are likely to find purebred dogs as well as ‘mutts’ at your local shelter. An example of

why this might be true relates to the Disney movie, *101 Dalmatians*. After the movie was released, doting parents of children who saw the movie rushed to buy a Dalmatian puppy for their family. However, after several months, when the ‘newness’ of the puppy had worn off and the reality of the size and activity level of these dogs became apparent, a significant number of these Dalmatians ended up at local shelters available for adoption. Finally, keep in mind that if you do not intend to breed your animal, then help control the overpopulation of dogs by having your pet spayed or neutered as soon as possible.

### Breed Characteristics

| Breed                   | Size *                | Activity**<br>Level | Temperament**   | Coat                                   | Comments   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---|--|--|
| Basenji                 | 17 in<br>24 lbs       | High                | Aloof with strangers<br>but loyal to owner                | Short-hair                             | Do not bark but<br>can howl (yodel)                  |
| Beagle                  | 15 in<br>25 lbs       | Moderate<br>to high | Gentle, even<br>tempered; friendly                        | Short-hair                             | Hunting dog; tends to howl or<br>bark                |
| Border<br>Collie        | 21 in<br>25-55 lbs    | Highly<br>energetic | Intelligent; fairly<br>easy to train; loyal               | Long-hair;<br>double coat              | Need lots of exercise                                |
| German<br>Shepherd      | 26 in<br>75-90 lbs    | Moderate<br>to high | Intelligent and train-<br>able; very strong dog;<br>loyal | Medium<br>length; double<br>coat       | Used frequently as police dog                        |
| Great Dane              | 39 in<br>100-120 lbs  | Low to<br>moderate  | Gentle ‘giant’  | Short-hair                             | Good with Children                                   |
| Jack Russell<br>Terrier | 12 in<br>14 lbs       | High                | Intelligent, moderate<br>temperament                      | Smooth, me-<br>dium length<br>or rough | Can bark or become aggressive<br>if not trained well |
| Labrador<br>Retriever   | 22-25 in<br>65-80 lbs | Moderate            | Loyal, friendly, adapt-<br>able                           | Short-hair;<br>double coat             | Love water; can be stubborn                          |
| Miniature<br>Poodle     | 12 in<br>16 lbs       | Moderate<br>to high | Intelligent, alert, peo-<br>ple oriented                  | Dense, curly,<br>non-shedding<br>hair  | Require lots of grooming                             |

\*Height and weight averages for breed

\*\*generally true for the breed

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