

Chapter 1

Beagles and You: Made for Each Other?

In This Chapter

- ▶ Appreciating the Beagle's nature
- ▶ Discovering what Beagles need from their people
- ▶ Comparing Beagle pluses and minuses
- ▶ Making the decision

Who can resist a Beagle? Those floppy ears, soulful eyes, and irrepressible good spirits can melt the heart of the most stone-cold human being on the planet. Even better, they're low maintenance — as least when you compare them to long-haired breeds, such as Afghan Hounds, Golden Retrievers, and Collies. But despite their many great qualities, Beagles aren't necessarily for everyone. To determine whether the Beagle is your dream dog, you need to know much more about the breed. This chapter summarizes the many advantages that Beagles offer to the wannabe dog owner, and also describes what Beagles need to live happily ever after with you.

Ain't Nothin' but a Hound Dog

The American Kennel Club (AKC), which is the number-one arbiter of dog breeds in the United States, recognizes more than 150 breeds. To make more sense of these various manifestations of *Canis familiaris*, the AKC has developed seven breed classifications, or *groups*. The breeds within each group generally have similar origins and talents, although they may not all look very much like each other.

The Beagle belongs to the AKC Hound Group. That's because although any dog of any breed has a far better sense of smell than any human, the hound breeds have the best sniffers of all. Those

noses enable hounds to be excellent hunters, and they can do their hunting without getting very much direction from their human partners. Many hounds, such as Greyhounds and Scottish Deerhounds, have great eyesight, too.

Physically and temperamentally, hounds are a pretty diverse group. Some breeds are sweet and mellow, others are feisty, and still others are somewhat aloof. Some, like the Afghan Hound, are quite large. Others, like the Dachshund, are notably short in stature. Coat types range from short and hard to long and soft, with a lot of variation in between. Still, most hounds are happy to curl up with you and share the love if they've had sufficient exercise and attention. And unlike some breeds that act as though they're the canine embodiments of Velcro, hounds are relatively independent. Occasionally they need their space — and if you sometimes need your space, they understand and give it to you.

Within the Hound kingdom, the Beagle is the court jester. He's a merry little dog who keeps everyone in stitches. He's a sociable fellow who enjoys company without getting neurotic. And he can be plenty mischievous, not to mention sufficiently independent to get into that mischief from beyond your immediate purview.

Other hound breeds

Beagles have plenty of company in the Hound group. Other breeds lumped into this category include:

Afghan Hound	Ibizan Hound
American Foxhound	Irish Wolfhound
Basenji	Norwegian Elkhound
Basset Hound	Otterhound
Black and Tan Coonhound	Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen
Bloodhound	Pharaoh Hound
Borzoi	Rhodesian Ridgeback
Dachshund	Saluki
English Foxhound	Scottish Deerhound
Greyhound	Whippet
Harrier	

The Beagle's Bill of Rights

Just like the American colonists back at the time of the Revolutionary War, every Beagle has certain inalienable rights — needs that must be fulfilled in order to have a happy life with you. Most of these needs are pretty basic, and no less than what you'd want for yourself. In other words, a little empathy from you should result in a lot of comfort and joy for your Snoopy-dog. That empathy should help you realize that Beagles and all other dogs need and deserve the things described in the following sections.

Lots of love

Beagles are relatively independent dogs, but they're also very social creatures. That means that a Beagle may have his own agenda, but that agenda almost always includes hanging out with his people as often as possible. He's not necessarily a stick-to-your-side dog, but he certainly wants to be part of any action that's going on within his household. If you're looking for an aloof pooch who prefers solitude to companionship, the Beagle is not for you.

Safe shelter

As Chapter 2 explains, Beagles were originally bred to hunt rabbits, but the typical pet Beagle doesn't get much opportunity to chase down bunnies (probably much to the bunnies' relief!). For that reason, today's Beagle isn't meant to live a life in a yard, a dog-house, or an outdoor kennel. He should live in your house with you, and be part of your family.

That said, keeping your Beagle in your house can be a challenging enterprise. The little hound's sense of humor may not always be to your liking; he has an uncanny ability to ferret out stuff that you don't want him to have (lingerie, anyone?). Chapter 5 contains lots of suggestions on how to make your home a great place for a Beagle and also limit his ability to make mischief.

Food, glorious food

Beagles are relatively small, so you don't need to worry about your canine companion running up a humongous food bill. Still your little hound does need enough nutritious food to keep his skin pink, his coat healthy, and his physique sleek. Chapter 8 explains not only what to feed your Beagle, but also how to feed him so he reaps the maximum possible benefit from every meal.

Room to run (preferably with you)

Like other dogs that were bred to hunt, the Beagle has a prodigious amount of energy — even though he's pretty small for a hunting dog. Unless you're giving your dog regular chances to chase down rabbits, you need to provide him with other opportunities to exercise. A couple of brisk, 20-minute walks each day can keep his muscles toned (not to mention what such strolls may do for your own health!), but don't limit yourself to twice-daily turns around your block. Head on over to Chapter 9 to find ways to be active that both you and your little hound will love.

A touch of class(es)

All dogs need some training, and the Beagle is no exception. For one thing, the trained Beagle is probably a lot happier than his untrained counterpart. The unschooled dog makes lots of mistakes, such as messing in the house, jumping up on people, and trashing household goods, but doesn't understand why his people are always angry at him. How would you feel if someone you depended on was angry at you, and you had no idea why? Probably pretty miserable. The same is true of the clueless, untrained Beagle.

By contrast, the trained Beagle has a much better time of fitting in with his family. Because he knows that he's not supposed to take a whiz on the white Berber carpet in the living room, he'll never get scolded for doing so. Because he understands that he's not supposed to become a canine pogo stick and jump all over his people, those people are happy to get down to his level and interact with him. The Beagle is a born extrovert, so all this positive interaction can't help but make him happy.

And he's not the only one who's happy — the people in the trained Beagle's life are happy, too. They have a family member who's a pleasure to be around and who doesn't cause undue stress. They don't have to worry about their Snoopy-dog growling at strangers, snapping at anyone who comes near his favorite toy, or finding an unwelcome little deposit atop their favorite easy chair. People with trained dogs are free to truly enjoy their dogs. A trained dog is a true companion, a friend in the best sense of the word.

Finally, the trained Beagle also is more likely to be safe than his untrained counterpart. That's because a Beagle with basic obedience training will know how to come when he's called, stop doing something when told to do so, and perform other maneuvers that can help keep him out of trouble.

Part IV gives you the scoop on how to transform your clueless little hound into a well-mannered Beagle, and how to deal with a dog who's got one or more challenging behavioral issues. Also included is information not only on how to train your Beagle yourself, but also on how to choose an obedience instructor and to choose among training options.

Great health care

Beagles generally are very healthy dogs — but like all dogs (and, for that matter, people), they need good medical care to stay that way. Providing such care is a two-pronged effort that consists of:

- ✓ **Preventing illness:** You and your veterinarian work together to keep all of your Beagle's systems functioning at optimal levels. Such care includes regular checkups, immunizations when necessary, determining your Beagle's reproductive future, and getting a handle on how your Beagle looks and acts when he's healthy. Chapter 11 addresses all these issues and more.
- ✓ **Treating illness or injury:** You and your vet work in partnership to help your Beagle recover from any illness or injury he sustains. Chapter 12 outlines symptoms that require an emergency visit to your veterinarian or emergency clinic, those that require a phone call to your vet, and which ones shouldn't cause you any worry. Chapter 11 gives you the lowdown on how to care for your dog after the visit to the vet, including a primer on dispensing any medication the vet prescribes.

Although Beagles generally enjoy good health, they are more vulnerable to certain conditions than other dogs are. Chapter 12 outlines those conditions and describes how you and your vet can resolve them.

Good grooming

Unlike other dogs, especially those with long hair, Beagles need relatively little grooming. However, "little grooming" does not mean the same thing as "no grooming"! The Beagle does require certain sprucing-up rituals to look and feel his best. Among those rituals: daily tooth brushing, weekly coat brushing, a monthly bath, periodic ear cleaning and nail trims, and ongoing efforts to keep his coat free from parasites such as fleas and ticks. Chapter 10 offers a primer on how to groom your Beagle.

Why Beagles Are Wonderful

Beagles don't win the breed popularity contest, but they come darn close. The American Kennel Club reports that in 2005, the most recent year for which figures are available, Beagles were the fifth-most popular of the AKC's 154 recognized breeds. Only Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Yorkshire Terriers, and German Shepherd Dogs drew more registrations than the Beagle did. The little hound has been consistently popular over several decades — in fact, the breed was number one in registrations from 1953 through 1959.

What's behind the Beagle's appeal? Probably several factors: For starters, they're cute; they're small; and they're easy to groom. Other pluses are that most Beagles are multitasked, supersociable, and get along well with children.

Hop on over to Chapter 2 to get more info on why so many people choose to share their lives with one or more Beagles. You'll also discover the Beagle's European ancestry and get the lowdown on what a Snoopy-dog is supposed to look like.

Buyer's Remorse: Why a Beagle May Not Be Your Dream Dog

As wonderful as Beagles are, they're not for everybody. In the interest of objectivity, it's only fair that I outline some of the challenges of trying to live happily ever after with one of these little hounds.

Among the Beagle's less-than-sterling attributes is his occasional stubbornness — in fact, without training, the Beagle can be downright ornery if his priorities conflict with yours. Part IV helps you counteract this independence — or at least channel it in another direction — by giving you detailed suggestions on how to civilize your little hound. I pay special attention to a frequent complaint from Beagle owners — that their dogs frequently flunk potty training — by devoting an entire chapter (Chapter 14) to housetraining.

Another possible problem that Beagle ownership may pose is that the dog's short, hard coat is practically guaranteed to worsen any airborne allergies that a person has. If dog hair makes you sneeze, a Beagle's presence may turn you into a sneezing machine.

Another possible downside is the breed's, well, mouthiness. Beagles are vocal creatures, and are not shy about expressing themselves in a regular dog bark or in that unique form of song known as howling. They are hounds, after all, and hounds do howl.

Chapter 2 explains what you may not like about Beagles, so you can make an objective decision about whether this breed is the right one for you and your family.

What to Ask Yourself

The best way to determine whether you're ready to welcome a Beagle into your life is to ask yourself questions that help you assess your needs and the dog's needs, and determine whether those two sets of priorities are compatible. This section offers points to ponder as you make this crucial decision.

Why do I want a Beagle?

Be sure that the reasons you want a Beagle result from your knowledge of the breed and yourself, not from misconceptions or will-o-the-wisp whims. Think about the issues in the following sections.

What do I like about Beagles?

Maybe you're interested in Snoopy-dogs because you grew up with one, and your memories of that dog are warm, fuzzy, and soft-focus. But it's important to remember that childhood memories don't tell the whole story of life with an individual dog.

That Beagle you loved also may have driven your mother crazy, perhaps because the dog never learned basic bathroom manners. And even if that Beagle was housetrained (to your mom's understandable relief), that dog was a unique individual. You probably will never find a Beagle who's quite like him — nor should you try to.

Or maybe you've met your neighbor's Beagle and adore that dog's friendly, outgoing personality. However, that dog not only has his own one-of-a-kind temperament, but also probably has had more than a little training and positive exposure to people. To help your Beagle be as sociable as your neighbor's, you'll need to put in *lots* of time to teach him basic manners and help him learn that the world can be a friendly place.

Chapter 2 tells you more about Beagle traits, and Chapter 7 explains how to socialize your Beagle. Part IV discusses how to make your Beagle a good canine citizen.

Who is this dog for?

Only two answers to this question are okay: “for me” or “for me and my family.” In other words, no Beagle or other dog should be a gift — and please don’t bestow a Beagle on another person as a surprise. Chances are, that surprise or gift will not be welcome. Unless you know that the recipient is dying to have a dog and is prepared to care for one, give an inanimate gift, such as a plush Beagle or other stuffed animal, instead.

And please don’t get a Beagle “for the kids” unless you, the parent, are prepared to take full responsibility for the dog’s care. Little kids generally are too young and irresponsible to care for a dog properly. Older kids and teens may have the necessary maturity, but they don’t have the necessary time. I’m lucky if my own teenage daughter has the time to walk our dog one night a week. Fortunately, I adore our dog and am his main caregiver — so my daughter’s lack of time to help out isn’t an issue.

Have I recently lost a dog?

Living with a dog, no matter how wonderful he is, carries a major downside: He will probably die before you do. And when he does, the loss leaves a huge hole in your life — and in your heart. The same is true if your dog is simply lost and hasn’t returned, or if you had to relinquish the dog to a shelter or somewhere else because you could no longer live with the dog. At such times, it’s natural to want to fill those holes with a new canine companion. By doing so, you hope to staunch the flow of grief that’s flowing from your soul.

But unless you’ve come to terms with your loss, hold off on adding a new dog to your life. If you’re still angry or grieving over the dog who’s no longer here, you’ll have a hard time forming a bond with the dog who’s arrived. Any dog deserves to have a person who loves him without qualification. If you’re still coping with the loss of an earlier canine companion, bonding with a new dog can be all but impossible.

No animal can replace another. Each dog, whether he’s a Beagle or any other breed, is a unique individual and deserves to be appreciated as such. If you’re still processing the loss of your previous pooch, you’re not going to appreciate the special qualities a new dog will bring to your life. For both your sake and the new dog’s, hold off on bringing that dog into your life until your sadness and anger over the loss of the previous dog give way to happy memories. I promise you that change will happen — in time.



If you had to relinquish a dog to a shelter or rescue group because the dog had behavioral problems, or if you had problems that made dog ownership impossible, make sure all such issues are resolved before you bring a new dog into your life. Otherwise, the issues that doomed your relationship with Dog No. 1 are likely to recur with Dog No. 2.

Do I have commitment issues?

A Beagle has a pretty good life expectancy for a dog: 10 to 14 years on average, and in some cases, even longer. If you add a puppy to your household, you're looking at more than a decade of care; with an older dog, your time together will be shorter, but the care you need to give will be the same. A Beagle from a shelter or rescue group may need even more care. Such dogs may have behavioral problems because they were mistreated or abandoned.

In any case, before you take any dog into your heart and home, you need to be sure that you can commit yourself to the animal for his entire lifetime. Consider the following questions:

Have I been thinking about getting a dog for a while?

You shouldn't add a dog to your life on impulse. If you've suddenly seen a dog whom you want to adopt immediately, slow down. Unless you've pondered whether you're ready for a dog and whether you can care for that dog properly, you need to wait. No dog deserves to be stuck with a person who's made a hasty decision that she regrets — or, worse, to be abandoned or relinquished to a shelter because that impulsive person decided that she didn't want a dog after all.

Have I thought about how a dog will change my life?

When you welcome a dog into your home, your life changes. Gone are the days when you can leave the office at 5 or later and head over to the local watering hole to schmooze with friends or colleagues — not when you have a dog who's sitting at home waiting to be fed, taken out, and played with after being home alone all day. Gone, too, are the days when you can sleep in on Saturday morning or stay inside on a rainy evening — not when you have a pooch who needs to potty outside at those times.

Your dog will need your care and attention every single day of his life — if not from you directly, then from someone trustworthy when you can't be there. From now on, any plans you make must take into account not just what you want, but also what your dog needs.

Am I willing to put a dog's needs ahead of my own desires?

A dog depends on you not only for basic care, but also for love and companionship — and you need to put that dependent individual's needs ahead of what you may want. Ignore those needs and you're likely to have a very neurotic dog.

I learned this lesson one long-ago summer when, as a single, dog-owning woman living in a city, I rented a share in a beach house that was located several hours' drive from my home. Every other weekend, I'd head to the beach house and board my dog in a local kennel. Within a month or so, Molly had become very skittish and would start freaking out whenever I was out of her sight, even when I went to the bathroom. (She'd cry outside the closed bathroom door.) I realized that between my being at work all day and being away on the weekends, Molly was literally crying for my attention. Her need for me was clear, so I ended my beach weekends. Molly was much happier — and, in the end, so was I.

Is my home good for a Beagle?

The Beagle is a highly adaptable fellow, but not even a Snoopy-dog is suitable for each and every home. To determine whether your home is Beagle-friendly or even Beagle-neutral, consider the following:

Do I already have a dog?

Neither a “yes” nor a “no” automatically means that your domicile isn't suitable for a Beagle. But if you do have a dog, and that dog is large, you may have a problem. That's because in the inevitable jockeying for top-dog position that will ensue when your Beagle hits the scene — a jockeying that could include growls, snarls, and wrestling matches that rival the WWE's *SmackDown* — a larger dog is likely to win, no matter how feisty your Beagle is. The best your Beagle can hope for is to escape uninjured.

In general, you're better off if both dogs are of the same approximate size and of opposite genders. Even then, however, you need to supervise the introductions and make sure the two dogs learn to get along. Chapter 6 describes how to introduce your new Beagle to any other canine members of your household.

What about my kids?

Beagles usually get along well with kids, assuming that the kids know how to treat a dog properly. But in too many families, that isn't the case. If your children are under the age of 6, think twice

about getting a Beagle or any other dog. Hop on over to Chapter 6 for suggestions on how to help your Beagle and your kids become best friends.

Do I live in an apartment?

A Beagle will not endear you to your neighbors if he gives in to his urge to howl. Think twice about bringing a Beagle into such close quarters. Your neighbors will be grateful.

Do I spend much time at home?

No one says that your Beagle needs to have you around 24/7, but this very social pooch will be much happier if you or someone else is around for at least part of the day. If you're the sort who's on the go outside your home from the break of dawn until the dead of night, you may have a hard time fitting a Beagle — or any other dog — into your life.

Can I afford a Beagle?

Dog ownership doesn't come cheap. Beyond the upfront cost of buying or adopting the dog, you take on plenty of other expenses when you welcome a dog into your family. Here's what you can expect to pay for over your Beagle's lifetime:

- ✓ **The dog:** No matter where you get your Beagle — from a shelter, a rescue group, or a reputable breeder — you'll have to part with some cash to bring that dog home. In mid-2006, the Beagle rescue group in my area charged a \$200 adoption fee to cover the cost of that Beagle's care in a foster home, spaying or neutering, and a microchip implant, among other expenses. A nearby animal shelter charged \$100 to \$300 to adopt a dog, depending on the animal's size. A reputable breeder is likely to charge several hundred dollars for a puppy, particularly if the pup is a show prospect. Chapter 3 outlines where you should look for the Beagle of your dreams — and where you shouldn't look, too.
- ✓ **Supplies:** You'll need to lay in some Beagle equipment before you acquire your Beagle: for starters, a crate, dishes, grooming gear, collar, leash, food, and toys. Chapter 5 tells you everything you need to buy for Beagle before he comes home.
- ✓ **Medical care:** Every Beagle needs a yearly wellness exam, as well as periodic immunizations against various diseases. And unless you plan to breed your Beagle, you'll also have to pay for the dog to be spayed or neutered — unless you adopt a rescue or shelter dog who's already been fixed. Additional

expenses will result when your Beagle gets sick and needs expert attention. Chapters 7 and 11 describe how you can work with your vet to keep your Beagle in the pink, and Chapter 12 discusses how to cope if your dog becomes ill or injured.

✓ **Travel expenses:** If you travel, you need to consider the costs of taking your Beagle with you or leaving him home. Chapter 13 covers the pro's and con's of either option.

A Final Thought

If you've thought carefully about why you want a Beagle, concluded that your domicile would be perfect for a little hound, determined that you will be a great parent and companion to a Snoopy-dog, and know that you can deal with the challenges this breed presents, congratulations! You've decided to add a wonderful dog to your life.

However, your decision-making is far from over. Now you need to determine whether you want a male or female Beagle; whether you want a puppy, young adult, or senior pooch; and where you want to start looking for your future companion. You also need to arm yourself with info on what to look for when evaluating the Beagles you meet. The rest of Part I will give you the scoop on how to find the Beagle who's just right for you.