

Chapter 1

Making a Match with a Poodle

In This Chapter

- ▶ Checking out the Poodle breed
- ▶ Figuring out if you and a Poodle are a match
- ▶ Choosing a specific Poodle
- ▶ Living with, training, and having fun with your Poodle
- ▶ Ensuring your Poodle's health

Welcome to the world of Poodles! This chapter helps you decide whether the Poodle is the breed for you. If it is, I'll help you find that perfect Poodle and give you information on training, health, and more.



No matter what type of Poodle you choose, and no matter what kind of activities you want to share with your pet, when you buy a Poodle, you add a new member to your family. Your new companion will be with you for years and will always give you his best; you should be prepared to give him your best as well.

Understanding the Poodle Breed

The following sections give you background information on Poodles and on the different varieties: Standard, Miniature, and Toy. Chapter 2 has full details on the Poodle breed if you want to know more.

Strolling through a brief history

Many people look at Poodles and think “froufrou.” It must be the hairdo, I guess, and the fact that sometimes the hairdo includes bows. A Poodle may even wear nail polish, which does make it hard for him to look “macho.” Or maybe the Poodle get its feminine label because people used to, or still, refer to Poodles as French Poodles, with the connotation that a French dog is dainty and above everyday doggy pursuits such as chasing a ball or chewing a stick.

In reality, the Poodle was bred as a working farm dog — ready, willing, and able to kill rats, herd livestock, and retrieve fallen game. Although the exact origin of the breed is unknown, the Poodle likely originated in Germany, not France. Early breeders designed the froufrou hairdo as a way to lighten the weight of a waterlogged coat while providing warmth and protection for vital organs and joints. Can you say the same for your designer cut? And as for the bows? Well, maybe they're used to attract affection.

Reviewing sizes and personality traits

When researching a Poodle to add to your family, one of the most important decisions you make is whether to go small, medium, or large (sorry, no supersizing). The following list breaks down the three Poodle varieties:

- ✔ A Standard Poodle, according to the breed standard (see the following section and Chapter 2), measures over 15 inches tall at the *withers* (the highest part of the back, between the shoulder blades). Most Standards are between 23 to 25 inches, and you may see some that are 27 to 28 inches. Females weigh between 40 and 45 pounds, and males weigh between 50 and 55.
- ✔ Miniature Poodles stand between 10 and 15 inches at the withers and weigh between 12 and 15 pounds.
- ✔ Toy Poodles measure less than 10 inches at the withers and weigh between 5 and 10 pounds.

As dogs go, a Poodle has a relatively long life span, living anywhere from 14 to 18 years. Standards usually come in at the lower end, and Toys commonly have the longest lives.

All Poodles should be lively, friendly dogs who get along well with other dogs and with people, and every dog has his own unique personality. The following list presents the different personality traits that the different varieties may exhibit. Remember that you're dealing with a living creature, so there are no hard and fast rules:

- ✔ Standard Poodles are a bit more reserved and self-contained than Minis and Toys, and they appreciate having jobs to do. Yes, they enjoy work! They also may be a bit calmer. I'm not saying that Standards are mellow and laid-back; they have tons of energy and enough bounce for any family.
- ✔ A Miniature Poodle wants to be active all the time, whether that activity involves playing with a ball, taking a walk, chasing a Frisbee, or going for a swim. Because Minis are small but still sturdier than Toys, they often are an excellent choice for

families that have children but aren't able to meet the space and exercise needs of a Standard.

- ✓ A Toy Poodle is happy to cuddle, though he's active when he needs to be. Many professional breeders and handlers consider the Toy to be a natural in the show ring, with personality plus to charm judges.



All Poodles, no matter the size or type, have a sense of humor. They like to have fun, and they want to make you laugh!

Considering breed standards

A breed standard is the “blueprint” for a given breed. It describes what makes the Poodle a Poodle and not, say, a Basset Hound. Conscientious breeders follow the standard and try to produce the ideal dog. For instance, the Poodle standard calls for a “square dog”; a long, low Poodle wouldn't be used in a breeding program.

The following list breaks down how two governing bodies of Poodle standards separate the varieties (see Chapter 2 for more info):

- ✓ **The American Kennel Club (AKC)** places the Standard and Miniature Poodles in the non-sporting group and the Toy in the toy group.
- ✓ **The United Kennel Club (UKC)** puts the Standard Poodle in the gun dog group and the Miniature and Toy in the companion dog group.

To Poodle or Not to Poodle: Is One the Best Dog for You?



So, you've read and heard some information about Poodles, and you're wondering whether a Poodle is the right dog for you. Before you run to a breeder or a shelter and stock up on pretty bows, you should ask yourself a few questions:

- ✓ Will a Poodle fit in with your lifestyle? Poodles like people and require quality time with their owners.
- ✓ Do you have room in your home for a Poodle? A Poodle needs an adequate amount of room to be comfortable.
- ✓ Can a Poodle handle living with your children or other pets? You need to take care when introducing a Poodle to kids and other animals.

You also need to consider the costs of Poodle ownership. Not only do you need to factor in financial costs — such as the price of buying a Poodle, healthcare costs, and grooming fees — but also time issues. Do you have enough time to train, groom, feed, and exercise your Poodle?

Chapter 3 has information on everything you need to think about to determine whether a Poodle is the best dog for you.

Selecting the Perfect Poodle for You

Have you done your research to determine whether a Poodle is the right dog for you? Are you ready to go out and get your Poodle? Have you scoured the Internet for cute doggie merchandise? Not so fast! First, you should pick out the traits you would like:

- ✓ Puppy or adult?
- ✓ Toy, Miniature, or Standard?
- ✓ Male or female?
- ✓ Which color?



You can go to a breeder to buy a Poodle, or you can check out shelters and rescue groups in your area. However, you should stay away from pet shops. Among other pitfalls, you don't get to see the mother's temperament, you don't receive a health guarantee, and the price is sky high.

Registering your dog with a reputable organization, such as the American Kennel Club or the United Kennel Club, gives you proof that your dog is a purebred Poodle. This proof is important if you plan to breed your Poodle. Even if you have no plans for breeding, your Poodle will need to be registered if you want to show in conformation. If you just want a pet and have no plans for breeding or competing, then you don't need to register your dog.

Head to Chapter 4 for additional advice on choosing a specific Poodle and on registration.

Adjusting to Life with a Poodle

Life with a Poodle is wonderful, but there are adjustments to make when you add a new member to your family. You need bowls, beds, toys, and a collar and lead, for starters. See Chapter 5 for more information about all the gear you need.

You also need to consider where in your home your Poodle will spend his days and nights, and you need to introduce him to other family members, both two- and four-legged. Check out Chapter 6 for complete details on welcoming home your Poodle.

Whether you decide to feed your Poodle commercial dog food, make home-cooked meals, or opt for raw food, make sure you provide your Poodle with a balanced diet that includes the proper proportions of nutrients. Always watch your dog's weight; extra pounds can lead to arthritis, heart problems, and diabetes. Head to Chapter 7 for the dish on feeding.

Grooming should also be near the top of your list in terms of Poodle care. Your first task is to create a grooming schedule for your Poodle. With a schedule in place, you can decide whether to groom your Poodle yourself or take him to a professional. Important grooming tasks, no matter who's holding the clippers, include

- ✓ Brushing
- ✓ Bathing
- ✓ Clipping
- ✓ Checking your Poodle's nails, eyes, ears, and teeth

You can get the full grooming scoop in Chapter 8.

Training and Enjoying Your Poodle

At the top of your “to do” list will be housetraining, and Poodles quickly learn this important lesson. Be consistent, and give your Poodle plenty of opportunities to do the right thing, in the right place. See Chapter 9 for more information on housetraining.

The same intelligence that makes Poodles easy to housetrain also means that without proper training, they'll try to run their homes themselves. This attitude leads to all kinds of trouble. A yappy, ill-mannered dog, no matter his size, isn't cute. Train your Poodle, whether he's a Standard, Miniature, or Toy; I give you guidance on training in Chapter 10.

I don't mean to sound like a puppy drill sergeant. Just because you're training doesn't mean you can't have fun. In fact, training means you can have more fun! The better trained your dog is, the more places you can go and the more activities you can try. For instance, you'll have an easier time socializing your Poodle, as you find out in Chapter 11, or you can travel with your Poodle, which Chapter 12 discusses.

For even more fun, you can consider competing with your Poodle. Chapter 13 outlines many of the exciting options available to you and your Poodle. Some of these include conformation showing, rally, obedience, agility, hunting, and tracking.

Keeping Your Poodle Healthy

Poodles don't need designer clothes or the latest in video games (although some do get the clothes). Your dog won't ever ask for a car, and you won't need to finance his college education (maybe just his obedience education). You won't spend your time carpooling your dog and his friends (I assume). And you certainly won't go into debt to pay for his wedding (I hope!).

I'm not trying to say that Poodles don't need care and maintenance. They do. They also cost their owners money, but compared to what a child costs, you'll spend way less, and you'll probably worry less, too!



According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the annual cost of owning a dog — not including illness or spaying or neutering — is between \$420 and \$780. If you settle on \$600 a year, over a span of 14 years, you'll spend about \$8,400 caring for your Poodle over his lifetime. That covers only half of your child's sweet 16 car or a year of college tuition!



Here are a few important health-maintenance tasks to add to your to-do list after you get a Poodle (I cover these in Chapter 14):

- ✓ Schedule regular visits with your veterinarian. Keep your dog up-to-date with needed vaccinations.
- ✓ Spay or neuter your Poodle.
- ✓ Exercise and examine your Poodle at home on a regular basis.

Any dog can have the occasional upset stomach, cut, or bump. You don't need to panic, but you do need to be aware and react properly. In addition, there are also breed-specific problems, such as patellar luxation in Toys and Miniatures See Chapter 15 for more information on common Poodle health conditions.

In an emergency, quick action on your part can help stabilize your Poodle before you make that trip to the vet's. Head to Chapter 16 for details on handling emergencies and first aid.

Senior dogs, just like senior humans, may need a different routine and a different diet to remain happy and healthy. Check out Chapter 17 for the full scoop.