

Chapter 1

Mixing It Up: Introducing the Mixed Breed

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding what makes a dog a mixed breed
 - ▶ Recognizing that size doesn't matter — a dog is a dog
 - ▶ Remembering that your dog — no matter his mix — wants to be your best friend
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The offspring of purebred dogs all look alike on the outside, and have similar personalities and temperaments. You can't say that about mixed-breed dogs. No two are exactly alike — even those from the same litter. Although their environment has a lot of impact on their future behavior, they still have specific genetic codes that are difficult to decipher.

Mixed-breed dogs — especially so-called “designer dogs” — have recently experienced a surge in popularity. Though actually hybrids — the offspring of two purebreds — designer dogs are highly prized for their unique characteristics. Designer dogs are very expensive, because they're in short supply and highly desired.

Very small mixed breeds have also become very popular. They're easy to transport, can be carried in a handbag, and offer all the affection and playful antics of their larger cousins. From 3 to 7 pounds, so-called “pocket dogs” are gaining ground, probably fueled by the fact that they're carried by their celebrity owners down the red carpet. Many of the current, popular pocket dogs are hybrids — the mix of two very small purebred dogs.

Most dogs — regardless of their breed or size — merely want to be with their human companions. Your dog looks to you for direction, companionship, food, shelter, and understanding. In return, your dog offers friendship, trust, and love. He'll never grow up and move away, he's there when you need someone to talk to, and he's

always ready to join in a game. Your dog doesn't have to be purebred to fulfill your needs. After all, your dog doesn't know what purebred is — all he knows is that he wants to be with you.

A Mutt by Any Other Name: Defining Mixed Breeds

A mixed-breed dog is one who has been conceived by two different purebred or mixed-breed dogs. The parentage of many mixed-breed dogs is unknown, because the breeding wasn't planned. Two unsterilized dogs crossed paths when the female was in heat, and the rest is history.

Mixed-breed dogs are alternatively called mutts, mongrels, or Heinz 57 dogs. No matter what they've been called, they aren't the sought-after purebred dog that people pay a lot of money to buy. Mixed breeds aren't recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC) and cannot compete in AKC-sanctioned shows. They're often frowned upon by purebred dog enthusiasts, who see mixed breeds as a dilution of the breed.

However, in recent years, mixed-breed dogs have become more popular. Not only are there now official clubs and events for mixed-breed dogs, but the AKC has allowed them to participate in its Canine Good Citizen certification tests (see Chapter 19). They're being put to work as service dogs, therapy dogs, and search-and-rescue dogs. They're valued as pets and companions. In some parts of the world, owning a mixed-breed dog is considered chic.

Each mixed-breed dog is unique. Even designer dogs don't meet any specific standard, such as those seen in purebred dogs. There's no guarantee of the adult dog's height, appearance, or temperament. What happens happens.



Although some designer-dog breeders claim that their mixed-breed pups are healthier due to breeding two different breeds together, this isn't always the case. The health of the pups depends on the two individuals who are mixed. Only through careful testing of the parents — such as X-raying hip joints, testing the eyes and heart, testing blood for specific diseases, and temperament testing for overall personality — that a breeder can be somewhat certain that the offspring will be healthy. Although most professional purebred dog breeders do these tests, few designer-dog breeders do so. And you can be sure that the owners of those wandering pets who crossed paths didn't do so either.



A designer dog is a dog whose parents were both purebred dogs, of different breeds. For example, a Golden Doodle has one parent who is a purebred Golden Retriever, and another parent who is a purebred Poodle. His mother may have been the Poodle, and his father may have been the Golden Retriever — or vice versa. The designer dog was bred intentionally by a designer-dog breeder. A non-designer mixed-breed dog is a dog who was bred either intentionally or by accident. One or both of his parents were *not* purebred dogs.

Even though you have no idea what your mixed-breed puppy will grow up to look like, there *are* ways to be sure he'll still be a good pet. Your good care, training, and love will make him the ideal companion. It doesn't matter what others might think when they see your short-legged, long-backed, droopy-eared, multicolored dog with the overshot jaw and wrinkled forehead. All that matters is your love and devotion to him, which he'll return tenfold.

A Tale of Two Dogs: How Mixed-Breed Dogs Come to Be

The story of mixed-breed dogs is often a sad one. Many people see them as a lower caste of animal — with no heritage and an unknown future. They overpopulate animal shelters and humane societies. They roam the streets in cities, suburbs, and rural areas, menacing wildlife and small pets. In their search for food, they raid garbage cans and alleyways. If captured by animal control, few are claimed, and most are put to sleep.

How to tell where your dog came from

The best way to figure out the breeds that make up your mixed-breed dog is to look through an encyclopedia of purebred dogs. Most mixed breeds have *some* appearance or personality that resembles one of the parent breeds. Often, you just have to look at color, coat type, or size to have a vague idea of which section to look in. For example, if the dog is large, has a beauty mark on the cheek, and has upright ears, there's a good chance he's part Shepherd. If the dog is small, with long silky fur and a short nose, there's a good chance she's part of some Toy dog breed, likely some Pekingese.

Make a list of your dog's attributes. Compare them to those you see in the encyclopedia of purebred dogs or head to Chapter 3, where you can find an overview of the different breed groups. When you have a fairly good idea of your mixed-breed dog's genetics, read more about those breeds to learn about their behavior, temperament, and health-related issues. Doing so will help you know your dog even better than you already do!

Just as people throw out old computers, or clothing that's no longer in style, mixed-breed dogs often suffer the same consequences when their owners no longer want to be bothered to care for them. The most common scenarios:

- ✓ Someone falls in love with a mixed-breed pup, but quickly tires of the pup as he grows and develops behavioral problems (because the person treated him more like a toy, than a dog). Broken toys are thrown away; mixed-breed dogs are abandoned in the streets or at local animal shelters.
- ✓ Someone wants to let her children experience the wonders of birth. How great is it to watch puppies being born and nursing! How cute the puppies are as they crawl around! Seeing the pups' eyes open for the first time, watching them eat solid food for the first time, and watching them play with each other — what could be better? But when the pups' mother no longer cares for them, the task of feeding and cleaning up after the puppies falls on the adult in the house. And if homes can't be found for the pups, they're abandoned.
- ✓ A dog just gets loose. The dog's owner tried to keep him contained, but where there's a will, there's a way, especially if the air is carrying the odor of a female dog in season, which many male dogs can detect from more than a mile away. It's not unheard of for a male dog to climb a high fence to escape or boldly run through an invisible fence's electronic field.



An unhappy dog without companionship will do what he can to get loose and find company. Dogs who are tethered outdoors break their ropes; those in pens dig under the fence; many in yards jump over a fence or take advantage of open gates because they want to find other dogs. And when they find other dogs, they often procreate — and then more unwanted mixed breeds enter the world.

Rarely does breeding of mixed-breed dogs happen intentionally. Though unplanned, many mixed-breed dogs can still bring joy and love to your life. Don't judge the dog on how he came to be, or where he was found — instead, consider how happy and fulfilling a future shared with that mixed-breed dog can be!

Even Toy Dogs Aren't Toys

"Mommy, Daddy, can I have a dog?"

Many families give in to their little one's wishes without thinking long and hard about it first. And many other people give a friend or loved one a dog for a holiday or birthday gift — not knowing whether the person really wants the dog or is prepared to care for

him. Unfortunately a good percentage of these “gifts” end up at the local animal shelters just a few months down the road — much like a toy that no longer works or isn’t played with anymore.



Dogs take work. Yes, they’re adorable — as puppies and adults — but putting time and energy into the care of your dog is essential if you want a happy, healthy companion. Think seriously about how much time you have to give before you commit to getting a puppy or adult dog. If you can’t give a dog proper care, you’ll do yourself and the dog a favor by not bringing him home.

Proper care goes hand in hand with overall health and well-being. In Part II, I let you know how to give your mixed-breed dog a good home, feed him correctly, groom him, and exercise him. A healthy dog is less likely to develop health and behavioral issues. Bottom line: If you take good care of your dog physically, he’s less likely to develop the kinds of behavioral problems that result in many dogs ending up in shelters, without homes.

Training is essential for every dog — big or small. A trained dog is happier, easier to live with, and more accepting of new situations. If all dogs were trained as puppies, the animal shelters wouldn’t be nearly as full. In Part IV, I guide you through the training process, as well as help you understand the special problems that can occur in mixed-breed dogs. As your dog ages, he’ll have special needs. In Part IV, I also discuss how to recognize signs of age-related behavioral changes, possible physical changes, and when the right time may be to let him go.

Any kind of dog can be a valued family member. What you get from your dog is entirely dependent on what you put *into* the relationship.

They Don’t Call ‘Em Man’s Best Friend for Nothin’

Wondering what you can do with a mixed-breed dog? Anything! You may not be able to compete in purebred dog club shows, but similar certificate-awarding shows are available for mixed-breed dogs. You and your dog are teammates in all performance activities. Your mixed breed can

- ✓ **Participate in obedience trials.** These are tests of your dogs’ response to obedience commands. See Chapter 16 for more information.
- ✓ **Participate in agility.** Not only does this challenge your dog physically, but also tests how well you communicate with him while in action. See Chapter 16 for more information.

- ✔ **Compete in flyball.** This is a relay team event with four dogs/handlers per team. The dogs run down a lane to fetch a ball and return. The fastest team wins.
- ✔ **Take the Canine Good Citizen test.** This test is a way of testing your dog's obedience and temperament in public. (It's not a competition.)
- ✔ **Work as a therapy dog.** Your mixed breed can bring joy to others by going to nursing homes, hospitals, and care centers.
- ✔ **Work as a service dog.** Service dogs perform important tasks for those who are unable to. They are guiding eyes for the blind, ears for the deaf, and hands for those without.
- ✔ **Assist with search-and-rescue operations.** Search-and-rescue dogs find lost people and save their lives.

In Chapter 17, I explain how to travel with your dog. I fill you in on preparing for your trip and help you make sure your dog is safe, secure, and relaxed during the trip, whether you're traveling by plane, train, or automobile. Because many dogs get stressed — or homesick — while traveling, I let you know what to do to help your dog become a traveling gent.

Mixed breeds can perform jobs to help people, save people, and inspire people. They're stars on the screen, stage, and television. They're heroes in the line of duty or while sifting through debris. They keep our borders safe, sniffing out dangerous chemicals and drugs.

Many mixed breeds have a bad start, but you can change that by adopting one that steals your heart. Just one stroll through an animal shelter or humane society, and you're bound to find one, or two, who'll give you the love and devotion you're looking for.

They don't call dogs man's best friend for nothing. Nobody can love you like a dog.