IN THIS CHAPTER

- Choosing the right breed
- Factoring in energy, fur, and intelligence
- Deciding on age and gender

Chapter 1
Considering the Canine Possibilities

You don't have to spend much time looking at dogs to realize that our canine companions may have started out as wolves, but we've meddled some since then with amazing results. No matter how many steps or how many hundreds of years passed, imagining the ancestor of a Maltese or Toy Poodle as a wolf is difficult at best. A Malamute, sure, a German Shepherd and maybe even a Collie — you can see the wolf in them. But a Maltese? Fluffy, sweet-natured, and small enough to fit in an oversized purse . . . it's hard to imagine such an animal chasing deer through a frozen forest or lifting a muzzle to howl at the moon.

But if you spend some time observing even the smallest, most adorable dogs, you will see the wolf. The same is true of every dog that has set foot on this earth since dogs began, generations of hounds and herding dogs, lap dogs and sled dogs. Despite the best efforts of our species to change their species, dogs are still, at heart, the animals they came from — pack animals with a language that's in many ways close to our own, making them a good fit in our own families.

That means Maltese or Malamute, Toy Poodle or Tibetan Mastiff, every dog is going to understand the meaning of a smile, both human and canine. Every dog is going to enjoy a good sniff of, and probably a roll on, the most disgusting, smelly thing available. And every dog, no matter the mix or breed, wants to be part of a family, a *pack*.

Considering Canine Packaging

Every dog may be a wolf at heart, but we've certainly done plenty to change the rest of the package, to soften some traits and strengthen others. No species on earth shows such diversity of size, shape, and purpose.

In my own home, I have dogs who'd crawl on their bellies for miles, skip meals, and forgo sleep on the off chance that someone, somewhere, will throw something into a body of water for them to retrieve, again and again and again until they fall over from exhaustion, still dripping the water that is as much their element as the air they breathe. One of my other dogs walks around puddles but has a tendency to herd children. My dogs are retrieving and herding dogs, in case you didn't guess. The behavior of one comes from the instinct to fetch prey, the other is motivated by an age-old desire to drive prey. Along the way, these hunting behaviors were separated — one to the retriever, one to the sheep dog — and bred to be stronger to give the animals a function in the human community.

TIP

Dog breeds and breed types differ in size, activity level, shedding level, and trainability. That means that becoming a canine expert is a good idea. Not for the opportunity to impress the family when you see a dog show on TV — "the Schipperke, a Belgian breed, first became popular as a watch dog for use on canal boats," you can say with authority — but for the ability to analyze how any particular breed or breed type will work as a member of your family.

REMEMBER

Choosing the right dog for you, your family, and your lives is the first step in acquiring the dog of your dreams.

Go back in time again to the wolf. Remember many of those desirable breed traits — chasing game, herding sheep, and protecting the pack — are wolf traits that have been strengthened or adjusted over time to make dogs a better fit in the human community. Other vestiges of other wolf traits live on in today's dogs, including the desire to know exactly where one stands in the pack, whether it's a canine or human family — and the accompanying desire to better one's status. (See how like us they are?)

Dogs, in general, are a little more easy-going than wolves, thanks to thousands of years of domestication. But you have to look no farther than dog-bite statistics to see that some problems still exist in the relationship between their kind and ours.

WARNING

The normal victims of these power struggles are children, the smallest, most vulnerable members of the "pack." When I read stories of a family dog — commonly an unneutered male from one of the currently popular tough breeds — that has attacked a child "without warning," I know that's not the whole story. While you may find some psycho dogs, in most cases the humans had more to do with the

outcome than the dog did. They got a breed that was too much for them, compounded the problem by not socializing and training the animal, and then didn't recognize the warning signs of a dog looking to be leader. The result was a tragedy for both the child, who must live with the repercussions of an attack for the rest of his life, and for the dog, who usually loses his life in the aftermath. Need a better reason to proceed with caution in choosing a dog? I didn't think so.

Statistics show the dogs involved in attacks are most commonly unneutered males, especially young adults coming into their prime — just another reason why neutering is so important. For more reasons to neuter your pet, see Chapter 17.

WARNING

CALL OF THE WILD: WOLF-DOG HYBRIDS

We never seem to get the balance right when it comes to wolves. First we hated them, almost to extinction. Now we love them — and their close relatives, wolf-dog hybrids — with a devotion that is for many wolfdogs as lethal as the hatred it replaced.

The result of a breeding between a wolf and a dog — most commonly a Husky, Malamute or German Shepherd — the wolf-dog hybrid is a beautiful, intelligent animal and a potentially dangerous companion that few people can handle or adequately care for. They are often destructive and can rarely be house-trained. Determined and resourceful escape artists, they can be chillingly efficient predators.

On these points, virtually everyone agrees.

On the point of whether they should be allowed a place in human society at all, widespread and often heated disagreement exists.

The intelligence that fanciers adore, combined with size and strength, causes problems at maturity, when wolf-hybrids do what comes naturally: Try for a higher place in their social order, challenging the authority of their human "packmates." Human deaths and injuries are more common with these animals, as compared to domesticated dogs as a whole, and you hear many anecdotal accounts of vicious attacks — especially on children — by seemingly docile wolf-dog pets. It's not their fault: It's their nature!

Because of these problems, some communities have tried to ban the wolf-dog hybrids, many humane and animal control shelters will not put them up for adoption, and the few groups that do give permanent sanctuary to unwanted hybrids are always at capacity. As a result, many a wolf-dog hybrid has paid for the surge in popularity with its life.

All of which means the wolf-dog hybrid is a pet all but a few highly experienced and dedicated dog-lovers should avoid.

Always look at the history of your particular breed. A large, powerful dog developed to protect land or property, working on his own and making his own judgments, is not likely to accept your input graciously. He may be highly intelligent, and even biddable in the hands of experienced dog handlers, but in many situations, he's all too often a time bomb.

REMEMBER

For most people and most families, the best dog is one from a breed (or mix of breeds) that has been developed to be responsive to training and human guidance and isn't too hung up on being in charge. Dogs specially developed as companions, such as the toy breeds, fill that role, and so do some hunting and herding breeds, such as the Golden Retriever or the Collie.

Letting Go of Love at First Sight

In dogs as in humans, the one you're immediately and most powerfully attracted to may not be the best bet for a long-term companion. You may have grown up with Collies in a suburban home with a large yard and your mother home all day, and you may still consider the Collie your favorite breed. But a Collie may not be the best choice for you today if you live alone in an apartment and are fond of expensive clothes in dark colors. So start fresh, with a fair appraisal of your life and of the dogs who offer the best fit.

I grew up in a home where the undisputed best breed of all time was considered to be a Boxer. While I'm still fond of them — one of my "nephews" is my brother's Boxer, Taz — I haven't lived with one since I left home. The reason? Dog saliva gives me hives, and while Boxers aren't the drooliest breed around — the Newfoundland would probably win that prize — they are drooly enough to make me limit my exposure to them.

My mother, on the other hand, thinks nothing of carrying a towel to wipe off a dog, but the little "fur mice" that congregate in the corners of my house — my dogs shed so much I'm thinking of having sweaters made from the fur — would make her scream. I keep the hand-held vacuum close by but otherwise pay little attention to the fact that my medium-coated dogs drop black fur, hair by hair, every day, and the long-haired one produces enough gray, white, and tan fuzz during his twice-yearly big shed to fill a grocery bag a week.

Fur or drool. Sometimes choosing a dog that suits you comes down to something as simple as that.

Everyone wants the perfect family dog. But you must take into account many factors in choosing the dog who's a good match for your home.

Photo courtesy of Howell Book House/Mary Bloom

Starting from Scratch

Choosing a breed or breed type is one of the most enjoyable aspects of adopting a dog. You have a chance to window-shop on a grand scale, to discover dogs you've never heard of and imagine life with breeds you've never seen before.

Start with an open mind, and be honest about your own life, your own preferences, your own expectations. Keep these factors in mind: Size and space requirements; activity level, fur factor, and trainability and dominance.

Sizing up a breed type

The range of size in dogs is truly remarkable, so broad that even though they are the same species, it would be unthinkable for a dog from one end of the spectrum — say, a Saint Bernard — to mate with one from the other, like a Toy Poodle. (Although never underestimate the desire of any dog to try to make such a coupling possible!)

Some people who adore small dogs are scared of large ones. Some who adore large ones speak derisively of small ones, considering them less than "real dogs," and calling them "powder puffs," "dust mops," or "rats." Size doesn't seem to matter

as much to the dogs themselves as to the people who own them; many small dogs have the pugnacious attitude that would be downright dangerous in a large dog, and many large dogs want nothing more than to curl up in their owners' laps.

REMEMBER

For the sake of practicality, size is the first factor you should look at when choosing a dog, if for no other reason than figuring out the cost difference between keeping a dog that eats one-quarter cup of food a day versus one that eats seven cups.

Dogs come in all sizes — even within the same breed, as shown by these American Eskimos.

Photo courtesy of Amanda Munz

My, that's a big dog!

For some people, only a large dog will do. Large dogs are the perfect choice for active people: joggers, hikers, and cross-country skiers. Even the friendliest large dog is a bigger crime deterrent than the surliest small dog (although crime-prevention experts say that even small dogs do a good job of alerting owners to the presence of strangers and letting the bad guys know that their approach has not gone unnoticed).

Should you consider protection training for your dog? See Chapter 14.

Large dogs can pull a wagon, walk for miles, chase a ball for hours. They are usually not so sensitive to the ear-pulls and tail-grabs of children, and a solid pat on the ribs will not send them flying across the room. Although a small dog may seem like a hot-water bottle if you let him share your bed, a large one may seem like a hot-water heater — as reassuring a presence and as loud (if they snore) as another human.

Still, there are trade-offs. The bigger a dog gets, the more food she eats and the more waste she produces. Big dogs can be more difficult to handle, more likely to knock over your toddler or your grandmother, more capable of destroying your home, more likely to inflict a serious injury should they decide to bite. A pushy small dog is amusing; a pushy large one is dangerous. Large dogs are harder to travel with and more expensive to kennel. If you don't own your own home, you may find securing housing that accepts a large dog nearly impossible.

Larger breeds generally need more exercise and are more likely to find other ways to shed nervous energy — like digging, barking, or chewing — if they don't get enough to keep them happy. Even the largest dogs are not impossible to keep in apartments, townhouses, and homes with small yards — if you doubt it, visit any doggy play group in Manhattan — but you have to work doubly hard to meet their exercise needs under those circumstances. Another thing to consider if you are an urban dog-owner is that a small dog can use a couple sheets of newspaper for relief on those blizzard days, while with a large dog the Sunday *New York Times* won't suffice.

Little things mean a lot

They may get their share of snickers, but little dogs don't care. They live a life big dogs can only dream about. Only a small dog can sneak into a department store hidden in an oversized purse. This kind of portability, the go-anywhere functionality, combined with adorable faces and shoe-button eyes, makes the small dog a whole lot more fun to own than a lot of "real dog" people can imagine.

Some practical advantages exist, too. You can give a small dog a bath in the kitchen sink, without straining your back lifting the animal. A small dog can sit in your lap while you watch TV. They're no trouble to walk, even for small children. Food costs are low. Your walk is a rapid trot for them, so exercise is easy.


REMEMBER

On the negative side, toy breeds can be yappy, and they are definitely fragile, which makes them unsuitable for homes with boisterous children. They have to be protected, too, from large dogs, some of which may consider a powder-puff dog as an appetizer.

Keeping up with your dog

Activity level isn't tied to size, except at the extremes. Some of the largest dogs seem barely interested in getting out of bed in the morning, while some of the smallest are on the go practically 24 hours a day. In between are dogs of all sizes and various activity levels.

TIP

You can sometimes gauge a breed's activity level by looking at the work it was bred to perform but, still, all you're getting is an overall impression. Each individual varies by breeding, age, and health, although the general rule holds true: If a dog was bred to go all day long, a sporting breed, for example, it is going to be more consistently "up" than a large, heavy, guarding breed that only worked when intruders arrived. Dogs such as Dalmatians, bred to run for miles alongside carriages or horse-drawn fire-trucks, aren't likely to take a laid-back attitude toward life. Terriers, developed to keep vermin at bay, are always on the alert and ready to rumble.

Puppy-testing can also give you an idea about activity level and is especially useful when evaluating a pup whose parents are of different breeds. See Chapter 4 for more information.

Some breed types tend to be selectively active — on outside, off indoors. Many hunting dogs and their mixes are active in the fresh air and fields, but are fairly content to curl up in front of the fire in the house after their exercise requirements have been met. The world's fastest dog, the racing Greyhound, is so fond of lounging that one rescue group calls the animal "a 40 mph couch potato."

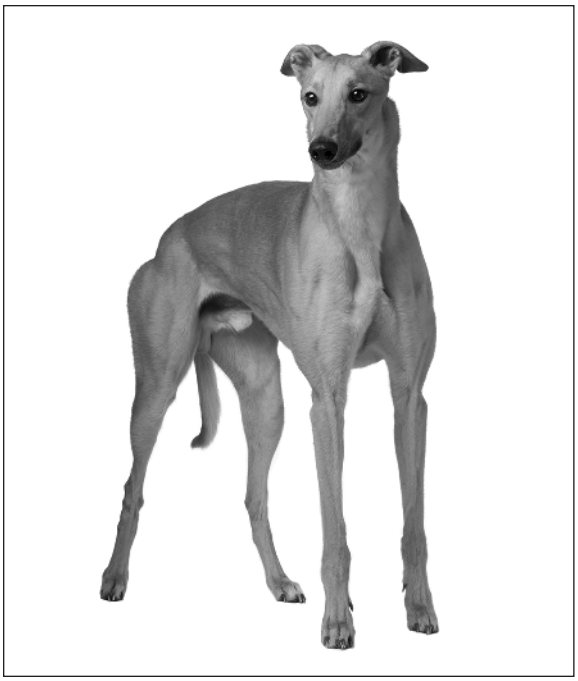
TIP

You can take the edge off the problems high activity can trigger — destructiveness and barking, for example — by giving active dogs enough aerobic exercise, daily, to keep them happy. When my retrievers don't get their exercise, they drive me crazy while I work. One good run, or a fast-paced game of fetch, settles them down just fine.

Activity level means more than exercise requirements, of course. Some breeds like not only to be moving constantly, but also to be keeping the world inform-ed of their activities. "Hyperactivity" and "yappiness" are also a matter of individual preference: One person's watchdog is another's yappy pest. For others, the playful liveliness of such breeds is ample trade-off for a little — or a lot — of extra barking. Again, be aware of what your tolerances are. Training can take the edge off the most undesirable of temperament traits, but nothing in this world can turn a peppy, barky Sheltie into a calm, quiet Bulldog.

WARNING

Some active breeds are so yappy that even their fanciers can't stand the noise and routinely have their dogs debarked. While the surgical removal of the vocal cords is sometimes the last chance for an otherwise good dog's survival (a discussion of barking problems is in Chapter 15), a breeder whose own dogs are debarked ought to give you pause. At the very least, debarked parents suggest that your puppy may grow into a dog who is unlikely to let a leaf fall without barking at it.



Greyhounds may have been bred to run, but when they retire from the track, most of them prefer to spend their days napping.

Beauty/photograph courtesy of www.greyhoundgang.com

Facing up to fur

Let me settle one thing up front: *There's no such thing as a dog with fur that doesn't shed.* (The slight hedge is for such breeds as the hairless variety of the Chinese Crested, a tiny little dog that can't shed what it doesn't have.) The corollary is that there's no such thing as a dog that's hypoallergenic. Some dogs do shed less and may be manageable for some asthmatics and allergy sufferers, but if you're not prepared for or capable of handling fur, you're better off with goldfish (not a cat and not a bird, because those can be even worse for many allergy sufferers).

The long and short of it

All dogs are covered with fur, except for the aforementioned Chinese Crested and a couple of other rare hairless breeds. But there the similarity ends, for the variety of coat lengths, colors, patterns, and textures is nearly endless.

Length? Think short fur like the Boxer to start with; then a little longer, like a Golden Retriever; then longer still, like a Collie; to the long-as-they-can-grow preferred locks of the show Komondor, a Rottweiler-sized dog covered with floor-length cords of twisted fur that looks like a cotton mop set in motion.

Color? Think sparkling white like some Samoyeds to glossy black like the Schipperke. Then think of everything in between, all kinds of colors with more words describing them than the marketing division of a fashion house could think up in a year. How about mouse-gray, fawn, wild boar, badger, and red stag? Wheaten and deadgrass, mahogany and chestnut? Medium brown? Too dull. Call the color *Isabella;* Doberman fanciers do.

Patterns? Spots, like the Dalmatian. Black with tan accents, like the Doberman, Rottweiler, Gordon Setter, or Manchester Terrier. Patches, like some Great Danes and Akitas. The tiger-stripes of the *brindles,* like Boxers or Pit Bull Terriers. The mottled mishmash of color known as *merle* in some Australian Shepherds, Collies, and Shelties. And don't forget the importance of accessories: white paws, white chests, white chest ruffs, and white head blazes.

And what about texture? Velvety short, long and silky, or wiry — and that's just in Dachshunds! Those coats exist elsewhere in the dog world, too, along with curly coats, wavy coats, rough coats, and smooth coats. Can you say lint brush? The short white hairs of a Dalmatian or the pale ones of a yellow Lab turn up on everything and are notoriously hard to get off. The Keeshond and the Collie, with luxurious coats so long and thick you can lose things in them, shed in the spring and the fall in clumps the size of hamsters — as do most of the breeds with a long, thick overcoat and a downy undercoat. The rest of the year, these fur factories shed "normally," as in a lot.

Some breeds shed so much long, silky fur that a small industry has sprung up to spin the hair into material for knitting, so dog-loving crafters can fashion their pets' fur into garments. A season's shedding is all they need to get enough yarn for a nice, toasty sweater.

More information on shedding is in the grooming section in Chapter 10.

REMEMBER

You can handle some of the fur preemptively by frequently combing and brushing your pet — what you pull out on a comb doesn't end up on your sofa — but you're still going to have plenty of hair with many breeds. If the hair is going to drive you crazy, think short-haired dog in darker color so the fur won't show as much.

Shedding isn't the only issue. Some dogs, such as poodles, have coats that need clipping every six weeks or so. You can learn to do the grooming yourself — your dog will probably survive the embarrassment — or you can take him to a groomer. If you choose the latter, that means money. Factor this in when deciding what type of dog to get.

TIP

Some pet-supply catalogs sell lint rollers in bulk at greatly reduced prices, as do pet-supply stores. You can also find a rubber squeegee-like tool that does a great job of pulling fur from carpets and upholstery, and vacuum cleaner attachments specially designed for dealing with pet hair.

When I bought my first long-haired dog more than twenty years ago, I left the breeder's home with pages of instructions — what to feed, what shots he'd had, how to get him registered, the names of trainers, the names of veterinarians, and the names of kennels. My head was spinning, and I paused on the porch, a puppy in my arms, and asked the breeder if I needed to know anything else.

She thought about it. "Yes," she said. "Never wear black."

Fashion dictates otherwise, so I became adept at using lint brushes. Years after Lance grew old and died, I was going through some financial records, looking for a receipt. In the file folder was a tiny tuft of dog hair. His. I almost cried.

I have a high tolerance for dog hair, but at least some of my dogs are now in sync with the trend: jet black. What they throw doesn't show, although the hair is still there.

Factoring in intelligence

People are always asking about how smart a particular dog is, as if that's good for anything more than bragging rights. Intelligence is fairly irrelevant when predicting how well a dog is going to work as a member of your family. What's more important is *trainability* or *biddability,* qualities that describe how much — or how little — a dog concerns herself with what you want her to do.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Part of the puzzle again goes back to looking at the job a breed was developed to perform. Some dogs — such as hounds — were developed to work alone or with other dogs but, in any case, independently of human control. The scent hounds — Beagles, Bloodhounds, and Basset Hounds — are more likely to follow their nose than your directions. Sight hounds — Afghan Hounds, Grey-hounds, and Salukis — aren't going to hear you at all once they get up to chasing speed. That doesn't mean that they won't wag their tail in rapt devotion after you get them back on a leash, but it does mean that in the heat of the chase, their instincts take over. Just as with a tendency to bark, training can take the edge off the tendency to ignore your wishes — but getting your dog to mind is going to be easier with some breeds than with others.

Consider three of the breeds most often touted as highly intelligent — the Border Collie, Golden Retriever, and the Doberman Pinscher. These dogs do extremely well in obedience competitions. Does that mean they're smart? Undoubtedly.

According to dog-intelligence expert Stanley Coren, these three breeds start to understand a command after they've had the command demonstrated less than five times. But something else is at work here, and if you think about how and why these dogs were developed, you can see what these breeds — a herding dog, a hunting dog, and a protection dog — have in common: They were all developed to work closely with a human handler. The successful performance of their work function — moving sheep around, retrieving downed game, and patrolling with a police officer or soldier — relied on teamwork between human and animal. They come prewired to look to a human for guidance, and if the human knows enough to provide that guidance, these breeds will gladly serve. That's their job, after all.

As with activity levels, intelligence and biddability are a little hard to predict in mixed-breed puppies. Puppy testing can help. See Chapter 4 for more information.

Decisions, More Decisions

You've probably got a breed or two in mind, or an idea of the characteristics you want in a dog — large, small, long-haired, or short-haired. Before you start looking for your pet, though, you should give a little bit of thought to some other details. What age of dog is right for you? What gender? And how much money is this going to cost, anyway?

WARNING

As with the people who want a Labrador Retriever because "we've always had Labs in our family," those who automatically choose a puppy, or always choose a male (or female), and aren't willing to be flexible on costs may be denying themselves the chance for a good dog.

Keep an open mind to the possibility that some details in the mental image of your dream dog should be left vague until you consider absolutely everything.

Puppy or grown dog?

The advantages of a puppy are obvious: Puppies are adorable, sweet, and cuddly. To look at them is to smile. A puppy is yours to work with, an almost-clean slate you can mold to fit perfectly into your life. (Or completely ruin if you're not careful!) Yours will be the only family she knows, as long as you keep up your part of the deal. That said, there are some real advantages to choosing a grown dog. They're often less expensive to acquire, and certainly less expensive to maintain, since their puppy shots and wormings are behind them. If you choose carefully, you can find one who's already house-trained, and maybe knows a little basic obedience, too.

So why don't more people consider a grown dog? The number one reason I hear is that most people believe that a recycled rover doesn't bond as well with their family as a puppy does. That's true if you intend to keep your dog in a barren backyard with little human contact. But if you welcome your dog fully into your life, she's yours just as much as the puppy you took from her mother at seven weeks. Some people say the bond is tighter because the dog has seen the world and knows how lucky she is.

I'm not sure about that, but I've seen plenty of both kinds of dogs. (And have some of each now.) The quality of love they show for their owners — and vice versa — is the same.


REMEMBER

A puppy is a good choice for you if you have the time, patience, and flexibility — not to mention the sense of humor — to deal with canine babyhood and adolescence. You won't find any shortcuts to the delightful business of puppy-raising. It's 3 a.m. walks and chewed loafers, endless hours of play and just as many hours of training. You don't really know what you're going to end up with until you end up with it — this is especially true of mixed-breed puppies, many of whom are bigger or smaller adults than anyone at the shelter could have guessed.

Puppyhood is a wonderful trip, full of surprises and delights, but one you shouldn't take if you aren't committed. If you don't put in the effort, you may end up with a dog who drives you crazy — or one you'll drive to the shelter when you can't stand him anymore.

Grown dogs have a bad reputation, one that's often undeserved. Aren't grown dogs that are up for adoption usually pets that *other* people couldn't stand? Is adopting one really such a good idea? It depends on the dog, of course. The real plus is this: While an adjustment period is inevitable with any canine relationship, it's a lot shorter with a grown dog.

Can you teach an old dog new tricks? She can be trained — all dogs, young and old, benefit from training — but you won't be able to influence her personality as much. If you've got a puppy with shy or aggressive tendencies, you can do things to help her before a problem arises (more on this in Chapter 9). If you have a shy or aggressive grown dog, change is a lot more difficult, and maybe not possible at all. Which is why you shouldn't be influenced by a sad story and big brown eyes when you're considering a grown dog.


REMEMBER

A grown dog is an excellent choice for situations where no one is home during the day. For retirees who love the companionship of a dog, but haven't the energy for a puppy. For someone who wants to feel good about giving a decent dog a second chance.

A puppy is an excellent addition to your family — and one that requires a lot of patience.

Greta/Photo courtesy of Stephanie and Michael Corby

There are so many mature dogs who deserve that second chance — mixed-breeds and purebreds both, retired racing dogs, service dogs, and show dogs. Dogs whose owners have died, divorced, or moved. Dogs who want nothing more than the chance to belong to someone.

In all the time I've been writing about dogs, I've watched lots of puppies grow up and disappear because the people who bought them did so because of emotion, not common sense. Consider your situation carefully, and if you honestly aren't up for a year of puppy antics, adopt a grown dog instead.

Male or female?

Does a male or female dog make a better pet? There's no way of settling that question for sure, so for most people the choice comes down to personal preference. You should consider *some* differences, however, because even spaying and neutering doesn't make males and females the same.

If you do not plan to spay or neuter your pet (more about that in Chapter 17) the differences are more distinct. Unspayed females are generally moodier than unneutered males. Although males tend to be more constant in temperament, they can be annoying in their constant pursuit of such male-dog activities as sex, leg-lifting, and territory protection. (Some would say constancy isn't a positive trait in these cases, and argue that some unneutered males aren't just constant, but rather constantly annoying.)

Unspayed females usually come into season for a couple weeks twice a year, during which time you need to deal with a varying amount of mess and the constant attention of canine suitors. Unneutered males may be less than attentive to your commands when the luscious smell of females in heat beckons. They can also be more likely to challenge your leadership — or anyone else's — at any time. Studies have shown, for example, that young, unneu-tered males are the most likely to be involved in attacks on children. Spaying or neutering generally evens things out a bit. It makes females more emotionally constant and males less likely to fight or roam. But differences remain.

TECHNICAL STUFF

In some breeds, for example, males are considerably larger than females — as much as 20 or 30 pounds and two or three inches. *The Complete Dog Book,* available in most libraries and bookstores, contains the official AKC breed standards, the "blueprint" of each breed in all areas, including size. This should give you an idea of the size difference to expect, as in this citation regarding the Newfoundland: "Average height for adult dogs [males] is 28 inches, for adult bitches, 26 inches. Approximate weight of adult dogs ranges from 130 to 150 pounds, adult bitches from 100 to 120 pounds."

Other differences aren't so easily defined. In the more dominant breeds, such as the Rottweiler, a female may be sweeter and more anxious to please. In the more shy and standoffish breeds, such as the Shetland Sheepdog, a male may be more outgoing and friendly. In some breeds, such a Golden Retriever, you might not notice much difference at all, especially in altered pets.

TIP

It's a better idea to concentrate on the breed or breed type rather than the gender, since the toughest male of an easy-going breed is probably a bigger cupcake than the mildest female of a breed with dominant tendencies. Talking to reputable breeders gives you a clear picture how the sexes differ, not only in the breed as a whole, but also in particular breeding lines.

For some people, the choice comes down to matter of landscaping: Males kill shrubs by lifting their legs on them, females kill lawns by squatting. Although some males squat and some females lift (at least some of the time), the generalization is pretty much on the mark. For more on dogs and landscaping, see Chapter 22.

Cost considerations

How much should a puppy or dog cost? Prices vary so widely that you can pay anything from "free," to the (generally) less than $50 that shelters charge, to the deal-of-the-century price that breed-rescue groups charge for purebreds, to several hundred for an "ordinary" purebred, to several thousand dollars for a show-quality dog of a rare or red-hot breed.

In general, however, a purebred, pet-quality puppy from a reputable breeder costs between $400 and $1,000, depending on several factors:

- Breeds that have small litters, such as many of the toy dogs, may cost more because there are fewer puppies to cover the costs of screening the dam for congenital defects, transporting her to the stud dog, paying the stud fee, caring for the mother during her pregnancy, and caring for the mother and puppies in the weeks that follow.
- Breeds such as the Bulldog require high levels of veterinary care in the breeding process, including cesarean sections, and that, too, boosts the price of puppies.
- Puppies with the potential to be successful in such canine endeavors as dog shows, field trials, or protection competition are more expensive, because these features are "add-ons" in the same way that a bigger engine or better options package drive up the price of a new car.

Bear in mind that a reputable breeder produces dogs hoping to improve her lines and, by extension, her breed, but she raises *all* her pups to be healthy companions first. More puppies end up with people who want a pet than with people who want a show dog, and a good breeder wants them all to be happy and well-cared for. If you want to lower your cost, consider this: Those things that distinguish the *pick* puppies — which can be something as unidentifiable to the majority of people as the correct placement of dots on a Dalmatian — are not really very significant to those who are looking for a companion animal. A knowledgeable breeder can explain those differences, most of which you can pick up by studying the breed standard.

REMEMBER

The true cost of a dog, of course, is in the upkeep, but at least you get to make payments on that. The most cost-conscious proper care — food, basic gear, preventive veterinary care, boarding or pet-sitting while you're on vacation — will cost you hundreds of dollars a year, and into the thousands for a 100-pound-plus dog who can consume 6 or 7 cups of high-quality kibble a day. Add in occasional veterinary emergencies and the strictly optional, but enjoyable, collecting of such tempting canine merchandise as a wardrobe of fancy collars, a softer, more decor-conscious bed, pictures with Santa, and breed wind chimes, and the cost of keeping a dog can consume a significant percentage of your budget.

As a result, you should keep the cost of acquiring a dog in perspective. A $500 purebred puppy from a reputable breeder costs $50 a year if you figure the cost over a ten-year lifespan. And $50 is about what it costs to keep my dogs in kibble for a month.

In the end, it's what you feel comfortable with, purebred or mixed, shelter dog or show dog. The price you pay has no bearing on the love a dog can offer.