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Chapter **1**

Sharing Your Digs with a Dog: A Big Decision

Can money ever buy you love? Sure. Just use it to buy a Chihuahua. Your Chihuahua won't waffle about making a permanent commitment to you. In fact, expect your Chi to envelop you in affection, do their best to protect you, and maybe even improve your health. No kidding! Scientific studies show that a pet's companionship alleviates stress and helps people relax. In many cases, dogs (and other pets) get credit for lowering their owners' blood pressure. However, although most Chihuahua owners are crazy about their pets, a few wish they had never brought a dog (or *that* dog) home.

We don't want Chihuahua ownership to disappoint you, so in this chapter, we talk about the ups and downs of living with dogs in general, and Chis in particular. Is this portable pet with the king-size heart the right breed for you? In this chapter, you find the answer.

Deciding if and Why You Want a Dog

If you are *dog-deprived*, you know it. You greet all your friends' dogs by name, eye every dog you see on the street, and sometimes even ask strangers if you can pet their pups. Maybe you surf through your favorite breeds on the internet or browse through the dog magazines at the bookstore. Do you have a list of possible puppy names in your head? You're already a *dog-goner*. It won't be long before other dog-deprived people are asking to pet your new puppy.

Ideally, you're drawn to dogs, and playing with them makes you feel good. But your reason for buying a dog may be less than ideal. For example, maybe you're lonely or bored, and you hope a dog can fill the void. The truth is, a little fur wrapped around a pleasant personality (like the dog named Manchita in Figure 1-1) spices up a bland life if you let it. Being loved by a dog is fulfilling in itself, and you can take it a step further and become involved in dog activities (see Chapter 12) that can bring you excitement, new friends, and a sense of purpose. So what's the problem? The glitch is that dogs purchased to relieve monotony often are ignored when the novelty wears off.



REMEMBER

Before buying a Chihuahua, you must decide if you'll always appreciate your pet or if you just crave some instant entertainment. Still not sure? Ask yourself this: "Am I ready to love a dog for the duration (possibly 15 or more years for a Chihuahua), or will a cruise to the Caribbean be just as effective for banishing my boredom?"

Getting a dog is a big decision. After all, dogs are dependent, make demands on your time, cost money, and inhibit your freedom. Is your pet worth it? Absolutely. That's why there are more than 83 million pet dogs in the United States. But just because dogs and people have been best buddies through the ages does not necessarily mean you need to run out and get a puppy right away. Maybe the Chihuahua life isn't right for you; maybe it is right for you, but not right now. Hopefully, you'll find out by taking a look at what living with a Chihuahua entails and the matchmaking tips in the following sections.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Chihuahuas are either smooth or long coated. Smooths have short hair that's soft and shiny (see Figure 1-1). Long coats have (you guessed it) long hair that may be straight or wavy (see Chapter 3 for more).

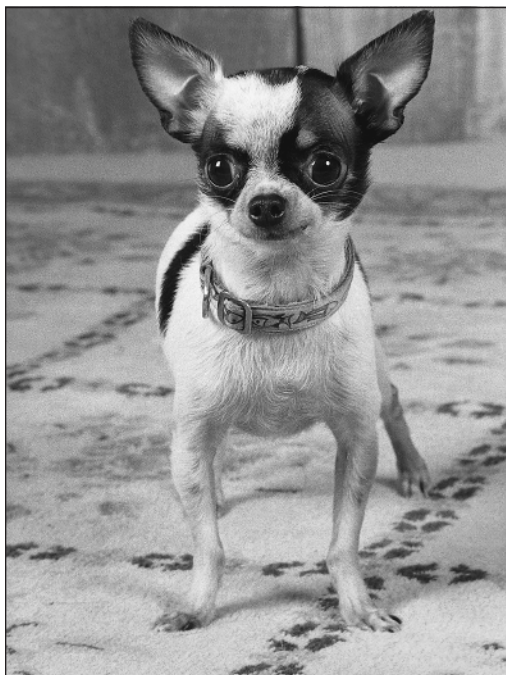


FIGURE 1-1:
This Chi
(named
Manchita) is
a smooth-
coated
Chihuahua.

Doggy Dependents Aren't Tax Deductible: Chi-Care Duties

Like a child, a Chihuahua relies on you for food, housing, education, affection, toys, and veterinary care — and the IRS won't even let you declare your pet. Unlike a child, your puppy won't ever become independent. Your Chi won't fix their own dinner, brush their own hair and teeth, or pay their own vet bills. Instead, they'll depend on you for their health and happiness all their life.

Fortunately, most dog owners enjoy the small chores that make up daily dog care. For some, interacting with their dogs is a restful transition from a too-busy day. Others say that their dogs keep the nest from feeling empty and add laughter to their lives. And when you have a doggy dependent, you're always the most important thing in their life. They need you from puppyhood through old age. They don't graduate, get a job, marry, or move halfway across the country.

You should discuss division of labor with your family before getting a dog, but don't expect even the most logical schedule to be carved in stone. In the end, someone — one person — must take responsibility, making sure your Chihuahua is fed, watered, groomed, trained, exercised, and taken outdoors when they indicate a need to eliminate. Because you're the one reading this book, I bet that someone is you. Will you relish or resent the responsibility?

Considering the long-term cost

Can you afford a dog? We're talking not only about the price of the dog (which can range from \$1,000 to \$2,500 or more for a Chihuahua puppy), but also the price of upkeep.

Some breeds — Chihuahuas, for example — don't eat much, but they still need the following:

- » *Quality* food (see Chapter 6)
- » Puppy shots, an annual checkup, and vaccinations and deworming as needed (see Part IV)
- » Minor surgery to spay or neuter (see Chapter 13), and potentially, removal of retained baby teeth, a procedure that is often performed at the same time as spay/neuter surgery
- » Medication to prevent heartworm, fleas, ticks, and other parasites (see Chapter 14)
- » A crate, grooming equipment, a collar and leash, dog dishes, and a variety of toys and treats (see Chapter 5)

And although Chis tend to be healthy, yours may rack up a big bill if they're ever in an accident and require emergency surgery or a week in a veterinary ICU. (Purchasing pet health insurance when they're a pup can help ensure you can cover such costs without a qualm.)

If all of those things fit your budget, lifestyle, and personality, then you are absolutely ready for and can afford a Chihuahua. Let's take a look at what you can expect.

Placing your Chi in your daily schedule

So you're doing fine financially, but maybe you're working crazy hours to reach the next rung up the corporate ladder. In that case, your Chihuahua's excited antics when you come through the door can be just the ticket to turn your mood from office mania to bemused tranquility. Forget fuming over a frustrating meeting. Your dog needs to be walked and fed, and both of you will look forward to snuggling through a sitcom or two. Just keep in mind that no matter how frazzled you are, and no matter how late it is, your dog still needs your attention and affection. If you and your Chi live alone, especially, you're their entire world.

Chapter 5 and the chapters of Part 3 deal with setting up a schedule for your Chi and socializing and training your little buddy.



TIP

Some offices allow employees to bring well-behaved pets to work. Jackie's Chihuahua spent many hours in the office when she worked for the American Kennel Club (AKC) in New York City. Sure, that's a special case, but while they walked to work, they saw plenty of other pooches accompanying people carrying briefcases. Dogs in the office are even more common these days.

Fitting your Chi into your family's future

Your spouse's feelings about having a dog, your kids' ages, your activity level, and your travel plans are important considerations

when deciding whether to make a Chihuahua part of your family. Bringing home a dog when your spouse doesn't want one or you're always busy with the kids is unfair to everyone. So is buying a breed your other half hates. In some cases a reluctant spouse grows to love the dog, but often one partner never quite comes around. Having to defend your dog on a daily basis gets old fast, and you don't need that. Furthermore, no dog deserves to be dumped at the pound because everyone got tired of the hassles at home.

Are you hoping to settle down and start a family in the near (or distant) future? Some breeds (Chihuahuas are one of them) are long lived, so with luck, you can plan on your dog being with you for your wedding and the births of your babies. But as sweet as that sounds, it may not be a good thing. Will your spouse also love your dog, or will they consider your Chi excess baggage?



WARNING

Another potential problem is that some breeds (Chihuahuas included) don't thrive around toddlers. It's a no-fault, lose-lose situation. While tiny dogs such as Chihuahuas are referred to as Toy breeds, they are living beings who aren't made for rough play. Chihuahuas are too delicate to be safe in the hands of young children, whose motor skills are still developing, so they're not suited to homes with kids under the ages of six or seven. Imagine how long your poor Chihuahua puppy would last if a toddler tripped over them or swung them by one leg like a stuffed teddy.

Picking up after your Chi



REMEMBER

When you live with pets, you are responsible for their well-being. That means you have to maintain a safe, healthy environment.

Before you commit to caring for another living being, consider how you do on your own. For example, what kind of housekeeper are you? Is your home casual and relaxed — the kind of place where friends gather to munch popcorn and stream movies? Or is your house so immaculate that family members remove their shoes before stepping on the cream-colored carpet? If any of this sounds like you, throwing a dog into the mix might not be the best idea (unless you are willing to change your habits.)

Puppies aren't perfect. Chances are you'll have to clean up some accidents while housetraining your Chihuahua. Not only that, but they'll shed at intervals (or constantly) all their life (see Chapter 7). Long after they're reliably housetrained — maybe years after you've moved into your dream home — they can get sick and upchuck on the new sofa. When that happens, will you view the mess as a minor annoyance or a major tragedy? (The chapters of Part 3 deal with socializing and training your little buddy.)



WARNING

Even though a Chi's poops are small, they can make a big mess on the bottom of someone's shoe. Don't forget to clean up after your dog every time you walk them (see Chapter 8). In many places, it's the law!

Viewing the Chihuahua as a Toy Breed

Let's say that after reading about the ups and downs of dog ownership, you decide that you want a canine companion. Right on! You're going to love living with a dog — that is, if your dog lives up to your expectations. Dogs are capable of doing an extraordinary number of things, but they are specialists in a sense, and no one breed does it all. A wrong match between dog and owner usually brings misery, like a bad marriage, while a good match means years of satisfaction and fun.

Some Toy dogs, such as the Toy Poodle, are downsized versions of their larger cousins. Others, like the Miniature Pinscher, have been around longer than the larger dogs that resemble them. Chihuahuas aren't a scaled-down version of any breed. They are a true Toy dog, developed solely to be companions to people. The following sections give you more details on this breed (for more, head to Chapters 2 and 3).

What's terrific about Toys

What do all the Toy breeds have in common? They're living proof that great things really do come in small packages. Here's the upside of a Toy dog:

- » **Toy dogs are small.** They fit anywhere and can get enough exercise in a small apartment if that's where you live.
- » **Toy dogs are cuddly and love human attention.** They form extremely strong bonds with their people, and many are content to warm a lap for hours.
- » **Toy dogs are portable.** They're ideal for people who travel a lot and like to take their dogs along with them.
- » **Toy dogs love to show off.** Most of them enjoy learning new things when they're taught with positive-reinforcement techniques.
- » **Toy dogs often are welcome where larger breeds are not.** For example, some condo associations limit the size of pets.
- » **Toys are real dogs.** They're intelligent and affectionate, with bold, fun-loving temperaments. Many of them make alert watchdogs.

TOY BREEDS ON PARADE

The American Kennel Club (AKC) currently recognizes 197 dog breeds and divides them into 7 groups, depending on the function each breed originally performed. The Chihuahua is a member of the Toy Group — a collection of small companion dogs. The AKC recognizes the following Toy breeds:

- Affenpinscher
- Biewer Terrier
- Brussels Griffon
- Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
- Chihuahua (smooth or long coat)

- Chinese Crested (hairless or powderpuff)
- English Toy Spaniel
- Fox Terrier (Toy)
- Havanese
- Italian Greyhound
- Japanese Chin
- Maltese
- Manchester Terrier (Toy)
- Miniature Pinscher
- Papillon
- Pekingese
- Pomeranian
- Poodle (Toy)
- Pug
- Russian Toy
- Shih Tzu
- Silky Terrier
- Yorkshire Terrier

According to AKC statistics, the top three most popular Toy breeds in 2021 were Yorkshire Terriers (13th among all breeds), Cavalier King Charles Spaniels (15th), and Shih Tzu (22nd). Toy Poodles also are popular, but knowing where they rank is impossible because all three varieties (Standard, Miniature, and Toy) are counted as one. Poodles as a whole, though, are the 5th most popular breed overall.



In the lingo of the dog fancier, the Chihuahua is considered a *natural dog*. That means their coats aren't trimmed, shaved, stripped, or plucked, and their ears and tail are left the way nature made them — not cropped or docked (in the style of the Miniature Pinscher, among others). In dog-fancier slang, that makes the Chihuahua a *wash-and-go breed*.

Potential problems with portable pets

Toy dogs need careful owners. Depending on your nature, that's one potential downside of owning a Chihuahua. Although most Chis think they're tough, they're more vulnerable to injury (especially being stepped on or tripped over) than larger dogs. Here are some other concerns:

- » When people with Toy dogs overdo carrying and cuddling and skimp on training, their pets become spoiled. And that can turn them into tiny tyrants or nervous wimps.
- » Toy breeds are social. Developing that typical Toy spirit means they need plenty of social interactions with a variety of people from puppyhood on.
- » Toy dogs neglected during puppyhood, or whose breeders aren't vigilant about health testing, socialization, nutrition, and veterinary care, may suffer myriad physical and/or mental problems at maturity.
- » Some people dislike Toy dogs and may make rude remarks about your Chi when you walk them. If you answer at all, smile and say something like, "Shh. He thinks he's a wolf."
- » Toy dogs are real dogs. Like every other breed, they need training and guidance. In other words, if you don't train your Chi, your Chi will train you.

Making a Match with a Chihuahua

All the Toy breeds make exceptional companions to the right people, but they aren't interchangeable. The 23 breeds come in a variety of shapes, coat types, and colors, and their temperaments and activity levels vary from lazy and laid back to extremely active. Is the Chihuahua the right breed choice for you? Here's a synopsis of what a Chi can and can't bring to a relationship. (And for more on the Chihuahua look and disposition, see Chapters 2 and 3.)

» **Chihuahuas are perfect pets — for some people.**

Because they thrive on togetherness, a Chihuahua is the ideal dog for someone who's home a lot and spends some time sitting. That's because Chis love to sit beside you, or better yet, on your lap. If you work from a home office, or if some of your favorite activities are watching television, reading, or surfing the net, your Chihuahua will be in pooch paradise. They're also an excellent family dog, provided the children are gentle and older than seven. But if you're on the go all the time and can't make space in your schedule to accommodate an accomplished lap warmer, this isn't the breed for you.

» **Chihuahuas aren't running dogs.** They enjoy a brisk walk around the block when the weather is nice, but if you want a jogging or hiking companion, check out some of the larger breeds. No, a Chihuahua isn't wimpy when it comes to exercise. Remember that they take several strides to keep up with just one of yours.

» **Chihuahuas are alert watchdogs with a bark much bigger than they are.** But they aren't guard or attack dogs, no matter what they think.

» **Chihuahuas are loyal and loving.** They believe in family first and are vigilant and discriminating when you have visitors. Your friends *may* become their friends after they get to know them.

» **Chihuahuas are easy to groom whether they have a smooth or a long coat.** If you're looking forward to fussing with hair, many other Toys have thicker, longer coats.

» **Chihuahuas are housedogs.** They can't tolerate cold or rainy weather, garages, drafty basements, or life outdoors in a doghouse.

» **Chihuahuas are super short.** That means you, your family, and your guests must watch where you walk. Don't worry. It becomes second nature in a day or two. But when you or your children have friends over, you must remind them to be careful not to accidentally step on or kick your tiny dog.

- » **Chihuahuas play games with you (you can find some in Chapter 8).** They may learn to fetch a small ball or chase a small flying disc, but they won't be able to handle any rough stuff. If you want a tough dog that plays hard, get a larger pet.
 - » **Chihuahuas can be great travelers.** Most Chihuahuas adapt well to the open road and love to watch the world go by from the passenger seat of a car, recreational vehicle, or semi (lots of truckers have Chihuahuas as road companions), safely ensconced in a carrier with a view, of course (see Chapter 5).
 - » **Chihuahuas must be taught manners, the same as any other dog.** Little and cute loses its charm fast when your Chi develops bad habits.
 - » **Chihuahuas are natural-born showoffs with a good memory.** After they learn a trick or two, they'll be proud to perform for your friends (if they're familiar with them).
 - » **Chihuahuas are sensitive.** They try to comfort you when you're sad and dance for joy when you're happy. They won't feel secure in a house full of friction.
 - » **Chihuahuas are delicate.** They need your protection from bigger dogs, even if they don't think so. And not just when they're on the ground. Big dogs have been known to snatch tiny ones right out of their owners' arms (yes, that's rare, but we thought we should warn you).
- Do you tend to get physical when you're angry? If so, it's best not to have any pet, especially not a Chihuahua. The first hot-tempered blow a Chihuahua receives will probably be the last.
- » **Chihuahuas are intelligent and highly trainable.** In fact, they're capable of becoming competitive in active events like agility, obedience, and more (see Chapter 12).



WARNING

Loyal, intelligent, trainable, portable, and incredibly cute to boot! If all those endearing Chihuahua charms have you captivated, you have plenty of company. In 2021, Chihuahuas ranked in the top 40 breeds registered with the American Kennel Club, coming in 37th out of 197. The little guys are big on popularity!