



Breed Selection

Finding your perfect canine companion can lead to a lifetime relationship that is unlike any other and full of rewards. Each breed offers unique characteristics in looks, personality and temperament, and with over 150 breeds recognized by the American Kennel Club and a plethora of mixed breeds, there is sure to be a dog to suit anyone's needs. But with so many options, how do you choose the dog that's right for you?

Deciding on a Dog

Sharing your life with a dog is a commitment and responsibility that is made most enjoyable by being well matched with your pet. Your decision in what kind of dog to get should be a carefully considered one, not one of impulse. There are several things to ask yourself when considering what kind of dog to get: why do you want a dog (jogging buddy, hunting helper, dog sport competitor, companion); what kind of accommodations do you have for a dog; how much time will you be able to spend with him; how much time grooming are you willing to spend; what traits are you looking for; and many more.

Though most people are first drawn to a particular breed of dog because of looks, this should not be the only deciding factor. A busy person who lives in a city apartment with more buildings than trees may be getting more dog than they anticipated with a Cattle Dog. Likewise, an active jogger looking for a running companion probably won't be impressed with the endurance capabilities of a Pug. Knowing the breed characteristics of a dog can help determine if he is the right dog for you. Breed standards give a guideline for how large a particular dog will grow to, what kind of coat he will have, as well as some insight to his energy level and temperament. It should be noted here that there are bound to be exceptions and that dogs should be considered on an individual basis.

In other words, just because a dog was bred to perform a certain duty does not necessarily mean that all dogs of that breed will fall into that generalization. The best thing is to research the breeds you are considering before jumping into anything. The AKC has information on all recognized breeds online at www.akc.org, and includes a breeder and enthusiast referral network that can be a vast source of information pertaining to your breed of interest.

Breeds by Group

There are currently over 150 recognized breeds by the AKC that are broken down into seven groups, plus a miscellaneous group for dogs that are not quite yet recognized by the organization as an established breed, but are on their way. The groups are determined by the job or function that particular dogs were bred to perform. Some generalities can be made about the dogs within each group, but each individual breed has its own standard, and each dog is an individual. Below is some introductory information on the various breed groups. More detailed information on the breeds within these groups can be found in books written specifically about the breed, through breeder or enthusiast groups, or online at www.akc.org.

Sporting Group

Sporting dogs are typically friendly, lively, intelligent, willing to please and not overly vocal. Being energetic dogs, they need daily activity of some kind to be happy and they often make wonderful companions for active people and families. Most sporting dogs will long outlast your arm in a game of catch. Though all were originally bred as hunting companions, they also excel at obedience and other dog sports through consistent training.

The sporting group is further divided into four categories based on their hunting style: retrievers, pointers, setters and spaniels. Retrievers recover fallen game for the hunter. They have to work close to the hunter and be able to remain steady and silent, even through gun shots, until the time he is needed to perform. Some retrievers include: Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers and Flat-Coated Retrievers. The Labrador Retriever and Golden Retriever currently rank number one and two of registered dogs in the U.S. Spaniels also work close to the hunter by running out in front to flush birds. They tend to be somewhat smaller in stature to their other sporting cousins.

Some spaniels include: Cocker Spaniels (English and American), Springer Spaniels, and Clumber Spaniels. Pointers work away from the hunter to find and point out game until the hunter can get to it. They must remain silent and still so as not to scare the game away before the hunter comes, and can tend to be more independent than other sporting dogs. Some pointers include: German Shorthaired Pointers, Vizslas, Weimaraners and Wirehaired Pointing Griffons. Setters work similarly to pointers, but typically, have much more hair. Some setters include: Irish Setters, English Setters and Gordon Setters.

Hound Group

Like sporting dogs, hounds were bred to aid in the hunt. Though somewhat less energetic than their sporting cousins, hounds are active, yet appreciative of a good snooze when the opportunity arises. Hounds are separated into two types: scent hounds and sighthounds. Though in the same grouping, the two types vary greatly. Scent hounds possess the best scenting ability of the dog world. These dogs hunt with their keen nose to track game from squirrels to mountain lions. Some follow a ground track while others follow an air scent. Once the game is found, scent hounds notify the hunter of their location through loud baying. Those interested in these breeds should know that this trait is sometimes carried over to pets that may bay at anything from the mailman to the moon. They can be somewhat independent, but are generally easy to get along with and quite social towards people, though some smaller pets may be mistaken as game and be chased. Scent hounds are now often used as service dogs. Some scent hounds include: Bloodhounds, Beagles, Norwegian Elkhounds, and Dachshunds.

Sighthounds include the oldest and fastest breeds of the dog world. These dogs hunt by sighting and chasing their game, though few are used for hunting anymore. Many sighthounds now excel in obedience and sports like lure coursing. If kept as a house companion, a sighthound will still need to be taken out for regular runs. These hounds tend to be quieter and more reserved than their scenting cousins. Some sighthounds include: Greyhounds, Afghan Hounds, Salukis, and Borzois. The Greyhound is the fastest dog and can actually outrun a horse on a short distance sprint.

Working Group

Working dogs were bred to aid people in a variety of duties including patrolling and guarding, search and rescue missions, pulling loads and sleds, and even fighters in war and against other animals. Many working dogs still perform the job they were originally bred to do, as well as new jobs in the military and as assistance dogs. They are almost invariably large and powerful dogs and need an owner who can handle their sheer size and strength.

Early obedience training is a must to manage a dog of this power and stature. They are typically alert, loyal and protective pets. It should be noted that some dogs of this group may display some aggression towards unknown people or other dogs due to their guarding or fighting backgrounds. Their energy level depends on the dog and the job they were bred for. Mastiff lines like the Bullmastiff and

Saint Bernard typically do not require much exercise and as such are often suited to living in small homes and apartments despite their size. Guardian dogs like the Doberman Pinscher and Giant and Standard Schnauzer require a good deal of activity to keep them happy. Nordic breeds like the Siberian Husky, Alaskan Malamute and Samoyeds also require a lot of exercise and sometimes have a tendency to bark or howl. Nordic breeds should have a secure confinement area as they may be prone to wander.

Terrier Group

The name terrier itself comes from Terra, the Latin word for earth. Most of these dogs were bred to keep rats out of barns and homes and go underground in search of prey like badgers, gophers, weasels and other critters. When hunting underground, the terrier would have to enter an animal's burrow to grab him. Since he could end up anywhere in the maze of the tunnel, he had to bark to notify his owner of his whereabouts in order to be dug out. With the exception of a few, like the American Staffordshire Terrier and Airedale Terrier, most are relatively small in size, but have the confidence and self-image of a much larger dog. They are very courageous and typically won't back down in the face of a challenger, whatever it is.

Playful and energetic dogs with an inquisitive nature, they seek out anything that might be of interest. Terriers excel at several sports like flyball, agility, disc competitions and earthdog trials. Potential owners should know that barking and digging habits are often carried over into pets. Some terriers include: West Highland White Terriers, Wheaten Terriers, Scottish Terriers, and Fox Terriers.

Toy Group

Toys were bred for entertainment and companionship, and because of their small size they can easily be accommodated in most any home. Their energy level can range from a mild mannered lap warmer to an all out sporting companion. A short walk around the block may simply be a warm-up to a large dog, but a full workout to a toy. Often times inappropriate behaviors are ignored by owners due to the size of the dog, but this doesn't have to be the case.

Though small, toys are intelligent and can be easily trained for obedience, agility, and tricks. Early socialization is also a must so they are well mannered around other people and confident in any situation despite their size. New owners should be extra diligent during housetraining, as this can often be a source of problems. A small dog means a small bladder that isn't capable of holding much, so frequent visits to a potty area throughout the day are necessary. Owners should also be ware of spoiling

their toy by coddling or giving in to bad habits. Some toys include: Malteses, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Papillions and Chihuahuas. Some toys are a miniature version of larger cousins like Miniature Poodles, Italian Greyhounds and Pomeranians.

Non-Sporting Group

Dogs in the non-sporting group were so labeled because they were not originally used in hunting and the name simply stuck. The one exception to this is the Standard Poodle, which was and often is still used to retrieve fallen birds in the hunt. Since the name applied to any dog that didn't hunt, the breeds within the sporting group are very diverse with little in common and no real generalities can be made. Dogs like the Bulldog were sometimes used for pastimes that are no longer practiced, like bull baiting and fighting, and are now being bred as mellow house companions.

Others, like the Schipperke are still used for guarding, and Tibetan Terriers (which isn't a true terrier at all) are used for all purpose farm dogs in their native country. Some dogs in this group can find their ancestral lines in other groups, like the American Eskimo. Other non-sporting dogs include: Boston Terriers, Dalmatians, Lhasa Apsos and Shiba Inus.

Herding Group

Dogs in the herding group were bred to help ranchers keep livestock together. Though used for a similar purpose, these dogs are well varied to accomplish the tasks they were bred for. Some stand close to the ground, like the Pembroke and Cardigan Corgis, to help prevent contact from flying hooves, while others are large and powerful to guard the same flock that they herd. Some of the dual purpose herding dogs, like the German Shepherd and Belgian Malinois, are widely used today as service and military dogs.

Their herding techniques vary as much as their body type: some dogs herd with barks and nips at the heels of their flock, while others only utilize intense stares. Herding dogs work well close with people and are typically highly intelligent with good problem-solving skills. They are very energetic and most content with daily exercise, as well as training to keep their minds active. Herders may give chase to smaller pets or even children in an attempt to keep them in their proper place. Barking can also become problematic with some herding breeds, as this is a natural trait in a few. Due to their quick thinking and lithe bodies, many from this group excel at obedience, agility, flyball and herding trials.

Some other herding dogs include: Australian Cattle Dogs, Border Collies, Bouviers and Old English Sheepdogs.

Mixed Breeds

Mixed breeds are dogs whose parents are different purebreds or other mixed breeds, and are the easiest dogs to come by. Mixed breeds abound in shelters and rescue organizations and are available to adopt for a much lower cost than that of a purebred from a breeder. One of the many benefits to getting a mixed breed dog is that he is an entirely unique combination of traits from two or more different kinds of dogs.

Like a purebred, knowing the traits of the parents can help you predict how a mixed breed puppy will turn out. If both parents are mixed breeds, it can be almost impossible to predict the temperament and traits. Mixed breeds are sometimes called the natural dog and are often unaffected by the health defects that some purebred lines may carry.

Where Do I Go to Get My Dog?

This question is best answered after you have determined what you are looking for in a dog and whether you are looking for a purebred or mixed breed. If you are looking for a purebred puppy or dog, the best place to begin is through a breed group to find a reputable breeder. Breeders and breed groups can also be referenced on www.akc.org.

A responsible breeder is someone who is dedicated to learning as much as possible the genetics, physical standards, health concerns, temperaments and needs of their chosen breed or breeds. They should be interested in both preserving and improving the breed standard with each litter. They are also interested in knowing about the people that are taking the puppies and are selective about placing them in good homes. Many will also take the dog back or offer guidance if, for whatever reason, the new home situation doesn't work out.

Some questions you might ask a breeder are: how big will the dog be when full grown; how much grooming is required; how much exercise will he need; how protective will he be; will he get along with other animals and/or children; and most importantly, what are the possible health problems

associated with this breed? The breeder should be eager and able to answer these questions and others with absolute honesty.

If you are looking for a mixed breed dog, or still interested in a purebred puppy or dog, check with your local breed rescue groups or shelters. (The Humane Society of the United States estimates that at least one in four dogs in shelters are purebreds.) If obtained from a shelter, they are usually spayed or neutered before they leave, so this is one cost that you will not incur. Extra care should be taken in selecting a dog from a shelter.

Some dogs may have a history of misbehavior that landed them there, or may come from a troubled past that can affect their behavior. Ask if the shelter gathers a history or performs any kind of temperament testing on the dogs they take in before adopting them out, and gather all the information you can from the adoption counselor or shelter workers before bringing your dog home. This can help you avoid getting a dog that you possibly aren't prepared for handling. Many rescue groups enlist the help of foster families that keep the dogs in their homes so they are able to evaluate the dogs' personalities and needs. They are somewhat selective in the homes that these dogs go to, and many will take the dog back if, for whatever reason, the new home situation does not work out.

Whether looking for a puppy or dog, it is generally not recommended to buy one through a puppy mill or pet store. Many puppy mills mass breed dogs in meager conditions just for profit, often producing dogs of poor health. Responsible breeders are looking to preserve and improve their breed of interest, not to over-breed their dogs for monetary gain. Some pet stores get their dog supply from puppy mills, so this further supports the cycle. Your best insurance in finding a healthy pet is through people with knowledge who have devoted their lives to preserving and helping dogs.

Friends for Life

Dogs aren't called man's best friend without due credit. They have been at our side for thousands of years as companions and guardians, drafters and herders, hunters and rescuers. Regardless of what you are looking for in a companion, you are sure to find it in a dog. At Blaser's Barks & Breakthroughs we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is each owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our breed selection tips and training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you are sure to treasure a lifetime of joy in your furry friend, whatever his pedigree.