

Breeds & profiles

Designer cross-breeds

Doodledog dilemma

Lez Graham weighs up the pros and cons of Poodle cross 'designer dogs'.

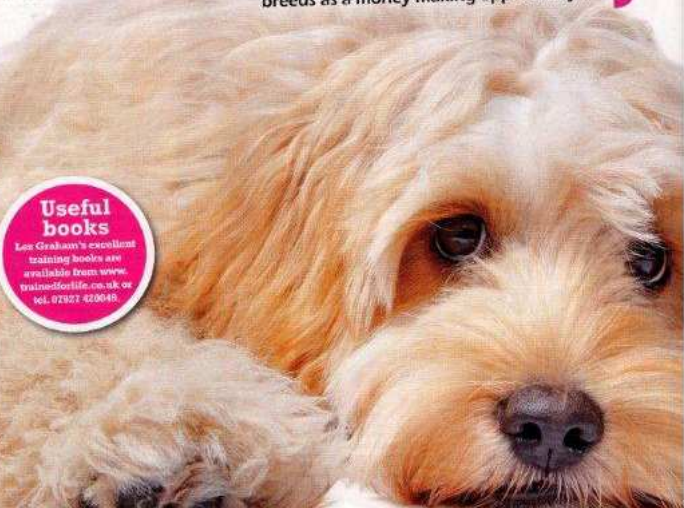
Although my heart belongs to the Labrador, I do have a Golden Retriever at home and have had, in the past, a few classic Heinz 57s. I'm not a pedigree purist, by any means, but I do believe in getting the type of dog – be that pedigree or cross-breed – that suits you and your family's needs and lifestyle. Primarily, though, I put health first and think that the most important thing to look

for when getting a puppy is robustly healthy parents, which means ensuring that the parents of your potential new dog have been health tested. This is no guarantee that your new puppy won't have any problems, true, but at least you know your breeder has done the best they can for the litter that they've

brought into the world. Mongrels – dogs whose parents are cross-breeds or are of indeterminate parentage, also known as mutts, Heinz 57s and bitza dogs (bits of this and bits of that) – have always been classed as being healthier and longer lived than pedigree dogs. However, while that may

have been true many years ago, when the dogs had lots of different breeds in them, I'm not so sure this is absolutely correct when applied to the designer cross-breeds we might call 'doodledogs' (Poodle crosses), which are now everywhere in the dog world and, unfortunately, in rescue centres too.

Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous people who are looking at this latest fad in designer breeds as a money-making opportunity...



Useful books
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ESTABLISHING A BREED

All breeds started somewhere: you only have to take a look at the Golden Retriever, an old family favourite. Originally bred by Lord Tweedmouth in the mid-1800s, the Golden was a combination of a yellow Flat Coated Retriever and the now-extinct Tweed Water Spaniel; there were also occasional outcrosses to an Irish Setter, another Tweed Water Spaniel and a black Flat Coated Retriever.

Many working dogs are cross-bred to improve working ability rather than looks, whereas the trend for a lot of the current wave of designer cross-breeds tends to be for 'aesthetics'. The Springer Spaniel cross working Cocker

Spaniel, for example, now carrying the vague title of Sprackler (as opposed to the old name of Springer Cocker cross), has been successfully used for many years by the shooting fraternity as a working gundog since it combines the best of both breeds for stamina, steadiness, hunting ability and speed. This has also resulted in the Sprackler being longer in the leg than the working Cocker, making it better able to work across more terrain. It's not just gundogs that have been crossed for performance; the New Zealand Huntaway has a number of breeds in it, all introduced to improve the working ability of the dog, comprising working Border Collie, Bloodhound, German Shepherd Dog and Rotweiler.



Photo: IT Images/Shutterstock.com

Wally Cochran is credited with starting a successful Labradoodle breeding programme in Australia during the 1970s and '80s.

NON-MOULTING MYTH

Originally the Labradoodle (Labrador Retriever X Standard Poodle) was bred in Australia in the 1970s as a guide dog for people with allergies. Although the Labradoodle has been bred extensively since, it is still not 100 per cent allergy friendly, neither is it a recognised breed in Australia. Many of the early breeders of Labradoodles in the UK started doing so as a way of improving the health and genetic predisposition of their favourite breed, be it Labrador or Poodle.

They were also trying to follow in the footsteps of our Australian cousins in creating a dog that was intelligent, biddable and didn't shed hair. Unfortunately, it takes a few

generations to get to the stage of a doodledog that doesn't shed or, rather, doesn't shed as much as other dogs. Quite often the first crossing of a Poodle and an 'other' will result in dogs that shed more!

The other thing about a first crossing is that the resulting litter will be unpredictable in size, temperament, colouring, ability and so on. This means that, until the litter is born, there is no knowing what you will get. **DOGS OF THE MINUTE?** It doesn't seem to matter where you look nowadays – online, in local papers, on corner shops' noticeboards – you'll see adverts for doodledogs, such as the Labradoodle, Goldendoodle, Pakapoo, Shipoo and Cockapoo. But many of these adverts will mislead the public by saying that the breed doesn't moult or that the puppies will grow into small-sized dogs.

The Cockapoo – the result of a cross between a Miniature Poodle and an American or English Cocker Spaniel – is said to have a charming personality.

time is needed; time and care from breeders to breed out the not-so-desirable traits and encourage those that we do want in our family pets. You only have to look at the previously docked breeds to see how, by not concentrating on one particular area of conformation, it has led, in many cases, to the toll 'doing its own thing', producing curling and whip-like tails, which breeders are now addressing via breed standards. But where does that leave the doodledog, since it doesn't have a set breeding programme to follow in order to improve the bloodline? Well, there are many dedicated and responsible breeders, such as Steve Kimble

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of Kimberlens Labradoodles who is not only doing his best to improve and maintain the quality of the dogs that he breeds, but is also educating the public on what a Labradoodle actually is – and isn't – dismantling the myths via his website (www.kimberlens-labradoodles.co.uk).

CASHING IN
Unfortunately, there are also unscrupulous people who are looking at the increasing popularity of these breeds as a money-making opportunity, and I'm not just talking about the scam of the breeding industry – the puppy farmers – for whom the doodledog has turned into a licence to print money. I'm talking about breeders who haven't necessarily been their successful in breeding Labradors or Poodles (or, indeed, any other breeds), or have kennels with dogs that wouldn't quite make the grade in relation to health tests. These breeders are putting our litter into the market from untested parents that potentially carry the worst of both breeds – not only health-wise, but temperament-wise too.

The Goldendoodle is derived from crossing a Golden Retriever with a Poodle, sizes can vary depending on what size of Poodle is used.

GUNDOGS AT HEART

By talking to owners, and from experience working with the dogs themselves, it seems that doodledogs are no different to any other gundog – and a gundog cross is what they are, even though the Kennel Club doesn't categorise the Poodle as a gundog. It is, in fact, a water-retrieving gundog. Give doodledogs leadership and boundaries, exercise and plenty to occupy their minds, and they will respond accordingly; you will see the wonderful, positive side of the two breeds coming out.

However, fail to do that and you will be on the receiving end of a dog that is physically and mentally strong, intelligent, boisterous, cantankerous and who may, like any other dog, use his teeth to demonstrate his level of frustration.

For me, the dilemma with the doodledogs is not to much

the dogs themselves, it's all the hype that surrounds them – to quote from my latest book *The Advanced Pet Gundog*: "Unfortunately with the advent of dressing dogs up, handbag dogs and designer mongrels (for example the Cockapoo and Springador), we've stopped seeing the dog for what it really is, an animal, a predator and which has all the drives and instincts of one."

Interestingly, while I was researching this article, 80 per cent of the websites I looked at had photos of these cross-breeds looking cute and, often, dressed up in clothing too. It is these kinds of images, and misconceptions that the breeds don't shed so will be low-maintenance as adults and suitable for people with allergies, that puppy buyers tend to fall in love with – often getting little change

from £1,000, in reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

The charity Labradoodle Trust (www.labradoodletrust.com; tel. 01644 470331) is doing a sterling job at educating would-be owners of doodledogs about the pros and cons of bringing one into your home, but the fact that there is a rescue organisation devoted purely to this cross-breed shows that things are going wrong somewhere with these dogs. If you are considering getting a doodledog (that is, any Poodle cross), I urge you to read the Labradoodle Trust's page on 'Things to consider before you get a Doodle'; read the information available on reputable breeders' websites, and talk to other owners – don't rush blindly into buying one because they're cute, furry and curly, and 'don't shed'.

Remember, a puppy is a direct result of both his parents; that means his parents' pedigree, temperament, health issues – and look!

Did you know?

Labradoodles were originally created by crossing Standard Poodles with Labradors, but to some people starting using Miniature and Toy Poodles in the breeding programmes. There are no guarantees what size puppies will grow to in first generation crosses, but this becomes more predictable when a Labradoodle is crossed with another Labradoodle.

About the author

Lez Graham has a Master's degree in canine behaviour and psychology and works full-time as a gundog trainer and behaviour practitioner. She is the education and development officer with the Guild of Dog Trainers and works with the Canine Institute of Dog Behaviour and Training.



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