

So you've decided you want a dog...

First things first

Top trainer **Lez Graham** provides practical advice on where to get a new dog from.

Making the decision to welcome a dog into your home is absolutely huge. Although you think you know what a responsibility having one will be, it's likely to be a shock to the system if it's your first dog. It's surprising just how much of your time a dog will take up, what with walking them, thinking about them and generally planning your life around them. And that's before you even consider the amount of equipment you need to buy to keep your new pet comfortable, fed, safe and well-groomed. Plus you'll be advised to invest in a decent vacuum cleaner to clean up shed hair, depending on the breed, and have a suitable vehicle in which to transport him when required.

Once you've come to terms with the pros and cons of bringing a canine companion into your world – and, for me, the former definitely outweighs the latter – you then have to consider where you will get a dog from.

WORD OF MOUTH

Years ago acquiring a dog was easy enough. You invariably knew someone who had a litter of puppies

to rehome. My first dog came from my sister; my second I rescued as a puppy from someone who couldn't tolerate him and so he was going to be put to sleep; next it was my first pedigree – Bert, a black Labrador. Then, while living in New Zealand, a litter of Golden Retrievers was recommended to me and, loathly, I returned to the Labrador breeder to get Bert's nephew.

It was all straightforward, but what if I hadn't fallen in love with the little black Labrador puppy? How would I have found a dog once we'd decided that we were going to have one?

Well, once you've decided on the breed or type of dog that you want, and that fits in with your lifestyle (see page 6), and whether you want a puppy or an older dog, then the mammoth task of finding one that suits you and your family is underway. If it's a puppy that you've decided on, then the first

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A good dog in the family makes a happy home.

Dogs Monthly Your new dog 3

and best place to start is always word of mouth recommendation and serious interviews with breeders, where you should both be asking each other lots of questions to ensure the best possible home for the pup.

PEDIGREE CHUMS

The Kennel Club (KC) website (www.thekennelclub.org.uk) provides vast amounts of information for people looking to buy pedigree puppies. By typing in the breed that you're interested in, you are able to choose from breeders in your area by clicking on regions of a map. You can then read about litters that have been registered with the KC and when they'll be available.

The KC also operates the Assured Breeder Scheme which promotes good breeding practices. Remember, though, that just because a breeder isn't part of this scheme doesn't mean they're not a good and responsible breeder, it

just means that they're not a member of the scheme. Another great source of information for pedigree puppies are the breed clubs – again you'll find these on the KC website, or by phoning the KC on tel. 0844 463 3980. I always recommend that you contact at least three breeders and, as well as asking them about their breeding lines, ask them about the other breeders that you may be interested in; you may get a fuller picture.

IS REGISTRATION IMPORTANT?

Although I know lots of very good pedigree dogs that aren't registered with the KC, personally I would be wary of getting a pedigree that isn't KC registered, after all, why go to the expense of purchasing a pedigree dog without that final piece of paper? Getting an unregistered pup may limit your options later depending on what activities (such as

showing and competing) you want to do with your dog – activities that at the time of picking your little bundle of fluff you didn't even know existed.

Puppy farming is rife, dealing in both pedigrees and the new designer cross-breeds such as the Cockapoo, Spitzpoo, Dorgi and so on. Unfortunately, puppy farmers are canny and come up with all sorts of tricks to lead the trusting public astray, and the excuses they make to prevent you knowing the truth about puppies' origins run along the lines of: "Oh my wife has just taken the mum out for a walk so you can't see her..." "I can't find the photo of the

sire – must have mislaid it!" "Take two puppies so one of its own will be lonely"; "I only have two puppies left and it's not fair to only take one"; and the best one of all – "I'll put the registration papers and pedigree in the post..." and, of course, in many cases you don't ever get them. In other instances, the papers you receive may not even be for your puppy!

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Insist on seeing the pups' mother (dam) with her babies, and stroke them around her so you can get a good idea of her temperament. Ask to see the father (sire) too

Clean living

Regardless of where you're planning on getting your dog or puppy from, the area that houses the dogs should be spotless. There should be no poos or puddles (although there may be a fresh one that the owner hasn't cleaned up), no dirty beds and definitely no empty or dirty bowls left lying around.

There shouldn't be an excess of barking once you've arrived either; the initial excitement of the visitor should soon fade, leaving behind it a sense of calm, and although rescue centres are very busy places there still shouldn't be endless barking every time someone new comes into the kennels.



Ensure you see puppies with their mother, and preferably father as well, so you can gauge size and temperament.

4 Your new dog Dogs Monthly

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– or, at least, his pedigree and a photograph of him, preferably with the owner and the dam so you know they got together at some point.

Dogs do get sick in their lifetime and many factors contribute to the wellness of a dog – it's not always down to breeding, just as with us, it can be down to lifestyle and diet. However, it is imperative that the sire and dam have been health-screened according to what inherited conditions are prevalent in that breed (for example with spaniels it's hips and eyes; in Labradors it's hips, elbows and eyes).

Although running the tests on the parents is no guarantee that your new puppy won't have any problems, at least you know he's got the best chance of having a clean bill of health.

OLDER PALS

If you've decided that an older dog would fit into your lifestyle better than a puppy, then there are a number of options to take.

- Finding a dog through word of mouth, although rare these days, does happen.

- Watch out for adverts on your vet's noticeboard, and talk to the vet nurses about the dog for an honest picture before you contact the owner.

- Contact local rescue centres, as well as the national ones. Breed clubs sometimes know of dogs needing new homes.

With a rescue dog it's highly unlikely that you'll know much about the dog's history, although the good rescue centres will have had some interaction with him, temperament-tested him and done some basic training, so you will have a fair idea of temperament before you take him home. Avoid any dog that has just arrived without being fully assessed, as you really could be putting your family at risk. The rescue centre should



Rescue centres offer a wide choice of dogs looking for good homes and good centres match dogs to owners.

interview you and make sure that you're suitable for the dog you fall in love with, and if you're not, then you should be guided towards an appropriate candidate. Listen to their advice since they, for the most part, know and want the best for all concerned.

Be prepared to have your heartstrings tugged at rescue centres, but do avoid letting your heart rule your head when it comes to choosing a dog. It's hard but, for the sake of all concerned, don't let emotion cloud your judgement.

Visit the rescue centre a number of times and interact with/walk your chosen dog a couple of times, chat to the kennel hands and be comfortable with your decision; a good rescue centre will allow you repeated visits and will empathise with your needs.

THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

I know it's turned into a bit of a cliché, but a dog really is for life. So, when you're choosing your dog, you must be willing and able to love and care for him for the next 10 years or so. With this in mind, be selective and be prepared to say "No", especially to the following:

Puppies

- Dirty kennels.
- Unkempt-looking and/or nervous bitch (mother).
- Growly bitch.
- Bitch not in attendance with puppies.
- Hereditary diseases.
- Aggression within the pedigree line.
- Other, unrelated, breeders advising against a particular pedigree line.
- Lack of health checks.

- Breeder arranging to meet up at roadside services, for example, and having puppies in the back of their car (with or without the bitch). This will, more often than not, be a puppy farmer.

Older/rescue dogs

- Dirty kennels.
- Unkempt-looking dogs.
- Any dog that needs two handlers in attendance (if he's that aggressive he shouldn't be rehomed).
- Any dog that the centre is trying to force on you.
- Any dog that has other people interested in him so you need to choose now.
- A dog on your first visit.
- A dog that a centre can't provide any/ enough information about.
- Aggressive tendencies, especially if it's your first rescue dog.