What You Need to Know before You Adopt a Dog

by Nicoletta Barrie
with Nancy Crist
Introduction

Your dog is the only relative you get to choose, so choose wisely. —Nancy Crist, Dogs Forever

Many people put more time and effort into finding the right vehicle than finding the right dog. Is it any wonder that two to three million dogs die in U.S. shelters each year? Do not make the mistake of choosing a dog simply because he is adorable or she is the breed featured in the latest Walt Disney movie. Take your time, read this booklet, use your common sense, do further research on your own and be responsible. Dogs are living, breathing creatures who deserve the best life you can provide.

The guidelines in this booklet and recommended websites are tools to help you choose a puppy or adult dog who fits your lifestyle, schedule and personality.

Dachshund
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Like to Sleep Late?
Things change when you get a dog. Consider the following.

- **Life is better with a dog. But life is also different with a dog.** Are you willing to make changes to accommodate the needs of a dog? An important point to consider: dogs take a lot of time. Yes, they are rewarding. But if you live alone and work twelve hours a day, then perhaps a dog is not the best choice for you. Hey, there are always those remarkable robot dogs or you might be able to locate a pet rock in a resale shop!
- **If you work late, invest in a dog walker.** Routine is important to dogs, and you should establish a set time for yours to be walked and fed.
- **Dogs need space.** Small space, consider a small dog; large space, get a large dog if you can handle his/her other needs.
- **Dogs need to live indoors.** Here are wise words from the Monks of New Skeet, well known for their training of German Shepherds: “If you want a pet you can keep outdoors, get a horse.” Dogs are social creatures by nature and they need to live indoors with the rest of the family.
- **Puppies and some adult dogs must be trained.** Puppies need to learn to poop and pee outside, and to behave and to make friends with other dogs (socialize). Good news for the impatient: there are lots of trained homeless adult dogs available for adoption. While many adult dogs at rescues and shelters are already trained, this is not the case with every dog. So be prepared to invest time and money in a basic
obedience class, so you and Spot will be speaking the same language.

- **Take time to groom.** You need to clean the dog’s teeth and ears, clip nails, drain anal glands, bathe and brush. And if you are not willing to do these tasks, then you must be willing to pay a groomer to perform them.

- **Stock up on toys and treats as well as bowls, leashes, collars, shampoo and other grooming aids.** It’s important for your dog to have clean water available at all times and toys to play with. Leashes, harnesses and collars should be at the ready for frequent walks. A five-foot or six-foot leash is a good length for walking. Leashes come in many different widths, so choose one that will be adequate for your dog. A ¼-inch leash for a poodle is not a good choice for a 90-pound Lab. While retractable leashes are popular, they are not the safest leash to use. Consider this: You are on a walk and at the last minute you realize your dog is about to eat a chicken bone or other “treasure” he’s found on the ground. You’ll have a hard time reacting quickly with a retractable leash. On the other hand, a quick snap and tug on a five- or six-foot leash will immediately give you control. With retractable leashes, you have to reel the dog in.

- **Find a good vet and establish a relationship right off the bat.** Ask friends with dogs for referrals and select the veterinarian you think you’ll best get on with. Have a wellness exam the week you bring your dog home and be sure he/she is vaccinated. Your dog will live a much better and longer life with regular checkups. Be sure to spay or neuter your dog as soon as possible. There are millions of dogs dying at shelters each year because there are not enough
homes. Be responsible; do not contribute to the homeless dog population.

- **Seriously consider the cost of owning a dog.** Call your chosen veterinarian and ask what they charge for the following: office visit, rabies vaccination, distemper/parvo vaccination, heartworm test, spaying or neutering. Visit the pet store, choose a quality dog food (first ingredient will be a meat, not a filler…see Chapter Four on Nutrition) and figure the cost of dog food per month. Now add the cost of a collar, leash, toys and treats. This will give you the least amount that you will spend on your dog. If she develops an ear infection, or he breaks a leg, your vet bill will be more than basic care.

- **Consider pet insurance.** See Chapter Six on Resources for a sampling of pet insurance websites.

- **Dog-proof your home.** Put all of your medicines and toxins (like cleaning and car products) **out of reach.** Also, it’s the higher shelves for expensive shoes and other chewable items and anything else your dog might otherwise get into. Puppies, especially, like to investigate and try everything, so be your dog’s advocate and put all untouchables out of reach.

**Having a dog is an investment in time and money, but you can reap many, many rewards:**

- Unconditional love, love, love, love, love
- Fun, joy
- Time outdoors
- Better health (and maybe even weight loss)
- A best friend
- A good listener
- A canine alarm clock
• A reminder when it’s time to eat
• A reminder that it’s ok to take naps when you’re tired
• Comic relief
• A foot warmer
• And so much more

Golden and terrier
**Chapter Two**

**Dog Breeds**

Which breeds suit your personality and lifestyle?

Be sure to consider the dog’s size, temperament, grooming and exercise needs. Does the dog shed a lot? Will an occasional hair in your oatmeal make you crazy? Do you have allergies to consider? Does the dog have medical/genetic problems related to his breed? Is her breed good with children? Also, consider the other pets in your household. If you have a male dog already, a female dog may be the best choice. If you have a female, then a male might be best. There is no hard and fast rule, but often dogs of the different genders get along better than those of the same sex. If you find a dog you are considering adding to your family, let your current dog meet the prospective new family member. It is often good to let dogs sniff each other through a fence first. If that goes well, take them for a walk together, on leashes of course.

Selecting a purebred dog means you know their roots and therefore can be more certain about their traits and characteristics, but mixed breeds make great companions, have fewer medical problems and cost less, sometimes much less. Some animal rescues take in dogs of all breeds and mixes while other rescues focus on a specific breed. Petfinder.com is a good place to start if you want to find rescues and shelters in your area. It allows you to search by city and state or zip code.

DNA testing is available nowadays to find out what breeds make up your mixed breed dog. We know of three major companies that offer the test: Wisdom Panel, BioPet Vet Lab and Canine Heritage. Amazon.com carries Wisdom
Panel’s test kit for $54.40 (22% off list price—that’s the day we did the check; Amazon.com prices, products, etc. can change anytime). To read all about Amazon.com’s offering, go to www.amazon.com/Wisdom-Mixed-Breed-DNA-Test/dp/B004GFN2ZA. On my visit to this site, there was an informative review from a biologist who does genotyping and who used the test for his dog.

PetMD.com has everything you might want to know about most breeds, from physical description to health, life span and the care each breed requires. Go to: www.petmd.com/dog/breeds.

Essentially, there are seven groups of dogs: Terriers (originally used to catch prey like foxes or rabbits), Working Dogs (includes some herding dogs like the Collie and also German Shepherd and St. Bernard), Sporting Dogs (Retrievers, Pointers, Setters and Spaniels), Hounds (variety ranges from the solid smallish Beagles to svelte Greyhounds and Borzois), Herders (like the Corgi), Toys (like the Pomeranian) and Nonsporting (Bulldogs, Chows, Poodles).

**Some breed suggestions by lifestyle:**

**Good with kids**
American Staffordshire Terrier, Beagle, Bernese Mountain Dog, Bichon Frise, Boston Terrier, Brittany Spaniel, Bulldog, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, German Shepherd, Golden Retriever, Keeshond, Labrador Retriever, Maltese, Poodle, Pug, Weimaraner, West Highland Terrier, Yorkshire Terrier

**Good for smaller households**
Brussels Griffon, Cairn Terrier, Chihuahua, Cocker Spaniel, Corgi, Dachshund, Lhasa Apso, Papillon, Pomeranian, Shih Tzu, Silky Terrier
Less Active
Basset Hound, Bulldog, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Pug, Silky Terrier

More Active
Australian Sheepdog, Australian Shepherd, Border Collie, Boxer, Dalmatian, English Springer Spaniel, German Shepherd, Labrador Retriever, Parson (formerly Jack) Russell Terrier, Rottweiler, Siberian Husky, Weimaraner

Less Shedding/Allergy Free
Airedale Terrier, Basenji, Bichon Frise, Brussels Griffon, Bulldog, Goldendoodle, Labradoodle, Lhasa Apso, Maltese, Poodle (Standard, Toy, Miniature) Schnauzer, Scottish Terrier, Shih Tzu, Weimaraner, West Highland Terrier, Yorkshire Terrier

Breed Descriptions:

We can’t describe all of the 300 or so breeds of dogs in existence, so here’s a sample along with a tongue-in-cheek description of a possible companion. While every breed is known for specific traits, each dog is unique. Factor into your decision the personality of the individual dogs you consider:

Malamute
Alaskan Malamute

The Malamute is a working dog who thrives in cold climates and requires lots of physical and mental exercise. Loves the outdoors. Doesn’t like being left alone for long periods of time and bores easily. Need to consider obedience training to handle this large (up to 125 pounds) canine, which was first bred for sled pulling and hunting. Without firm leadership and stimulation, these dogs can become destructive.

Companion: Someone who enjoys cold weather (and perhaps lives in a colder climate) and outdoor sports like winter hiking/backpacking or snowshoeing and likes to take the malamute along. Doesn’t mind finding a hair in the soup from time to time.

Australian Cattle Dog

A working dog that herds cattle Down Under. The Australian Cattle Dog is exceptionally intelligent, alert and protective of his home base and the creatures he shares it with. Physically agile, strong and active, this dog loves adventure and bores easily. Don’t let him get into trouble by leaving him to his own devices.

Companion: An outdoorsman who needs a smaller dog than the malamute. This companion will take his dog on all of his adventures and be as loyal to the Australian Cattle Dog as the dog is to the companion.

Beagle

Calm, friendly dog good for families with children. The beagle has a sharp sense of smell, which—along with her enthusiasm for trailing and fondness for exploring—appeals to hunters.
Companion: Often, a hunter or hiker. Also, kids who love hearing the pup bay and maybe sing along with her.

Bernese Mountain Dog

Easygoing and mild-mannered, the Bernese Mountain Dog is also smart, strong, agile, calm and confident. Reserved with strangers, gentle with kids. Plays well with other pets. Likes to be part of family activities.

Companion: Educated. Spends a lot of time outdoors with dog friends and their companions and often brings the kids along.

Chihuahua

Very popular small dog, the smallest dog breed in the world. Devoted to her companion. Loves other dogs.

Companion: The most well-known Chihuahua owners are probably heiress Paris Hilton and actor Mickey Rourke. Rourke notably thanked his Chihuahuas at the 2009 Golden Globes when he won the best actor award for his comeback role in The Wrestler after years in the acting wilderness. "Sometimes, when a man is alone, that's all you got is your dog. And they've meant the world to me," he said in his acceptance speech.

Golden Retriever

Great learner who remembers dozens of commands. Loyal, playful, loving and patient, with a willingness to please. Great family pet. Loves human companionship.

Companion: Fun-loving family who likes to take their retriever with them on vacations.
**Greyhound**

The greyhound is a study in contrasts: Slim and fast yet calm and gentle; independent yet eager to please. Does not like living outdoors.

**Companion:** A little shy with a good heart. Pets probably sleep on his/her bed.

**Labrador Retriever**

The most popular breed among families. Intelligent, affectionate, loyal, patient and gentle. Easily trained. Loves to hunt, run, chase and swim. Stays a puppy well into adulthood.

**Companion:** An outdoorsperson who is loyal and a good all-round individual to hang with. Meets with other Lab companions for a long walk weekend mornings.

**Maltese**

Maltese is the ultimate lap dog. Lovable, playful, loves to be pampered and praised. Still, she is feisty, bold and not afraid to challenge larger dogs. Shouldn't be allowed to become the pack leader.

**Companion:** Nurturer. Pack leader. Loves and cares for dog like a child.

**Miniature Poodle**

A sensitive dog that tends to be loyal to a single person and shy with strangers. Smart, eager to please and obedient, which makes the breed popular.
**Companion:** Affectionate snowbird.

**Miniature Schnauzer**

Less aggressive than some other terriers; feisty, lovable, curious and alert.

**Companion:** Has a seatbelt for the schnauzer, who enjoys riding shotgun.

**Papillon**

Too cute for words. Yet, this dog is smarter and tougher than she seems, often described as a big dog in a little body. Watchdog, believe it or not, who is very protective. Can be litter trained.

**Companion:** A princess (often) with a British accent.

**Pit Bull**

The Pit Bull is the most maligned breed of all, yet not so long ago it was considered America’s family dog. That was before hoodlums started using these poor dogs in dog fighting, gaining them a reputation as killers. Pit Bulls are the sweetest, most loving dogs and the biggest clowns you will ever find. In a responsible home, a Pit Bull makes an awesome family member.

**Companion:** An independent thinker. Someone willing to invest the time to train and socialize their dog so that he or she is a good ambassador for pit bulls everywhere.
**Rottweiler**

A working dog from Germany, where the breed is primarily used as a guard dog or police dog. Although both confident and imposing, the Rottie can be shy around strangers. Socialization and obedience training is especially important with large, powerful dogs such as the Rottie. If the dog companion does not become established as the pack leader, the dog may take the title. This would likely lead to overprotective behavior and possible aggression.

**Companion:** Someone who knows that big black dogs are misunderstood. Willing to put in the time to train a dog properly.

**Rottie and Mutt**
Chapter Three
Medical and Exercise Needs

These are general lists that you may want to add to on your own or change somewhat. For instance, you may want to check for fleas every day, especially in summer, or give your dog a bath twice a month if he likes to get dirty.

**Things to do for your dog every day:**

- Walk
- Feed
- Pet
- Love
- Give treats for good behavior
- Check poop to be sure it is normal

**Things to do for your dog every week:**

- Check for fleas/ticks
- Check for lumps, sores, any physical changes
- Brush coat

**Things to do for your dog every month:**

- Clean ears and teeth
- Bathe

**Things to do for your dog every year:**

- Annual physical checkup

**About vaccines,** typically, a puppy will receive a distemper/parvo vaccination at a few months of age, followed by a booster and a rabies vaccination at five
months. A year later, the dog will get three-year distemper/parvo and rabies vaccinations.

If you adopt an adult dog, a general rule is to provide distemper/parvo and rabies vaccinations the first year. One year later, three-year vaccinations for distemper/parvo and rabies.

German Shepherd Mix: Max
Chapter Four
Nutrition

The food you feed your dog is a significant factor in his or her health. If you use a cheap food, like most of the dog food sold in grocery stores, your best friend will not enjoy optimum health. If you read the ingredient list on a bag of inexpensive dog food, the first (main) ingredient is typically corn. If the majority of your diet consisted of corn, how healthy would you be? Cheap, low-grade ingredients equal poor health.

The way to choose a quality dog food is to read the label. You want to see a meat, usually chicken, as the first ingredient. In most cases, a food with chicken as the first ingredient is less expensive than those listing venison, duck, salmon or lamb as the primary ingredient. It’s a good approach to try a food with chicken as the primary ingredient and see how your dog does. If he has diarrhea or starts scratching, that could mean he’s having an allergic reaction to the chicken. If that happens, try a food with another meat.

Most quality food will be found at pet stores rather than grocery stores. To cut down on the amount of time you spend reading labels at the store, visit one or both of these sites, which review dog food brands: www.dogfoodadvisor.com and www.dogfoodanalysis.com. This will help you narrow down your choices. You’ll soon discover that huge companies with huge advertising budgets are not necessarily producing quality food.

Do your research and shop smart. Your dog is counting on you.
One of the Crist clan, Jack, looking pleased after demolishing his bed.
Chapter Five

Dogs Forever

Dogs Forever is located in Eastern Iowa. It was founded by Nancy and Mike Crist, who have helped put this little book together. They have also given me permission to use the name Dogs Forever in my children’s adventure novel, *Clover and the Twins*, to be published later this year. The Crists not only love dogs, but for some 20 years they’ve put their money where their mouths are. They founded and ran an animal rescue in Iowa for eight years and saved some 800 animals. They have nine dogs of their own.

Dogs Forever is Nancy and Mike’s latest endeavor. They won’t rest until there are no more homeless dogs. First, Iowa. Next, the world.

What is Dogs Forever Safe Place?

Simply put, it’s a safe place for dogs. It’s an animal rescue organization that seeks a better life for our best friends, in particular those on death row.

Dogs Forever Safe Place provides refuge for homeless dogs, where they receive loving care, free of fear and free of the threat of being euthanized. This is their sanctuary until Dogs Forever places them with a reputable rescue, a no-kill shelter or a forever family.

Safe Place provides:
- A Meet ‘n’ Greet area where visitors can get acquainted with dogs available for adoption.
- Dogs Forever Store filled with quality new and used items for dogs and the people who love them.
Programs include:

- A Memory Wall that celebrates the memory of a beloved pet whose companions make a $25 donation.

- Seniors for Seniors—this program removes the barriers for seniors 65 and older who want to adopt a dog. Senior dogs have much to offer: affection, loyalty and friendship, and they are less demanding and easier to manage than a puppy or younger dog, making them a good match for their human counterparts. To make the arrangement workable, Dogs Forever not only eliminates normal adoption fees, but helps the seniors adjust to their adopted dogs and takes away the worry should the adopter become hospitalized or be unable to provide food or veterinary care.

- Betty Blue Crew—Betty Blue is a rescued Blue Pit Bull and the mascot for Dogs Forever. When she was rescued, she was emaciated and had been badly beaten and left on the street to die—presumably after she did poorly in dog fights she was forced to participate in. Today, fully recovered, Betty Blue represents Dogs Forever’s program about reporting animal abuse and neglect.

- Mend a Friend—A personalized program where each donor can contribute to the health of a specific homeless dog.
Chapter Six

Resources

These websites provide additional information to help you make an informed decision in choosing the right dog for you. Many of them also provide useful information once you adopt a dog and have questions on nutrition, health and behavior.

Rescue

- www.Petfinder.com is a great way to find rescues and shelters in your area
- www.dog-rescue-iowa.org is Dogs Forever
- www.nycacc.org/ is the Animal Care & Control of NYC
- www.bestfriends.org is one of the larger animal rescues
- The various purebred dogs have rescue organizations just for them. Look online at www.akc.org or www.petfinder.com

Medical

- www.dog-health-today.com
- www.petmd.com
- www.vetinfo.com
- www.helpmyhound.com
- www.dogsonly.us

Research Breeds

- www.kelseycanine.com/
Pet Insurance

- www.petsbest.com
- www.petinsurance.com
- www.mypetinsurance.com
- www.purinacare.com
- www.petcareinsurance.com

Breeders

We feel that there are far too many homeless dogs to encourage breeders to make more, but we understand there are some people who simply won’t get a mixed breed dog. To those people, we ask that you please check the breeder out thoroughly. Get references. And go to one or more of these sites to find the right questions to ask and what to look for. Also, do your own internet search for the breed you are interested in, e.g. Finding a reputable golden retriever breeder.

- www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/tips/finding_responsible_dog_breeder.html
- www.dummies.com/how-to/content/how-to-find-a-good-dog-breeder.html
- www.almosthomerescue.org/breeders/breeders.htm

Dog Food Reviews

- www.dogfoodadvisor.com
- www.dogfoodanalysis.com
About the Author: Niki Barrie has had a lifelong love of animals, both wild and domestic, which has influenced her career path as well as her personal life. She has been involved in nature publishing and the photography industry as a writer, photo editor, text editor, publisher and agent. She has worked on staff for leading conservation magazines Audubon, National Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited and for picture agency Corbis, Inc. As a freelance writer, Niki has written and photo edited for photography and art magazines, websites, ad agencies and has long-term associations with several picture agencies. Niki is editor of the North American Nature Photography Association's (NANPA) publications Currents and Expressions and past editor-in-chief (1991-2011) of the American Society of Picture Professionals (ASPP) The Picture Professional and NANPA's Ripples. Niki served on NANPA's Board of Directors for five years. She was named a NANPA Fellow in 2000 and received the association's Russ Kinne Recognition Award in 2003. ASPP honored her with the 2006 Picture Professional of the Year Award.

About the Illustrator: Nancy Crist is a writer and public relations specialist for J.W. Morton and Associates. She devotes all of her spare time to rescuing dogs, currently through Dogs Forever.

Niki Barrie’s book *Clover and the Twins* will be available later this year on www.amazon.com
Visit her website at: http://cloverandthetwins.wordpress.com/
Author Niki Barrie’s children’s adventure novel, *Clover and the Twins*, will be available through www.amazon.com later this year. See website: [http://cloverandthetwins.wordpress.com](http://cloverandthetwins.wordpress.com)

Channel and Bezel Sini, ten-year-old spokesgirls for Dogs Forever, knew their involvement in an advertising campaign for homeless dogs would be exciting. But not until they adopted a feisty dog named Clover did they realize just what a rollercoaster ride it would be.