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**CASEY’S CORNER**

by Joan Merriam

**Choosing a New Dog, Part 1**

So, you’ve decided to add to your family by adopting a new dog. Great!

Spring is a perfect time to bring a dog or puppy into your home: of course there’s the drier weather, meaning you don’t have to worry as much about those muddy, wet paws all over your floor or couch or bed. Spring is also when shelters and rescue groups tend to have more dogs up for adoption…and if you’re looking for a puppy, spring is considered “puppy season” (although there’s really no such thing, as dogs have puppies all year round).

But that decision to become a dog household—or to add a second dog to your home—is just the initial step. It’s also the easiest.

After that, your first issue will be whether to adopt or buy. My own position is that adoption is *always* the best option, if only because there are so many homeless dogs in need of forever families. If you plan to show or breed your dog, you’ll probably want to find a responsible breeder—but that’s another issue for another column. (As an aside, today more and more competitions are open to mixed breeds, so even wanting to compete doesn’t necessarily limit you to purebreds.)

But let’s say you’re going to adopt. What now?

**Breed, Size, and Temperament**

Before you start your search, you need to decide what type of dog is best for you and your family.

First off, forget the old adage that you have to buy a dog from a breeder if you want a certain breed. From Airedales to Yorkies, almost every breed has a breed-specific rescue group, so do some research or ask your veterinarian. And don’t forget that shelters often have purebreds. Just keep in mind that while there’s a general belief that you have a better chance of getting what you want with a purebred, there are no guarantees. Even having a “pure” breed doesn’t mean he still can’t have serious behavioral problems or genetic health issues.

In terms of size, if you live in a tiny apartment, a Great Dane would not only be impractical for you, it would also be unfair to the dog. Big dogs are often more suited to rural living where they have room to roam; also, larger breeds like Labs and golden retriever tend to adapt well to family life because they’re more patient and easygoing. On the other hand, smaller dogs are more “portable” and easier to handle for those who don’t have the desire or physical strength to wrestle a big dog.

If you have young children, you’ll probably want to avoid adopting a senior dog, simply because she may not have the energy or temperament to keep up with a child’s activity level. On the flip side, small children can be problematic for tiny puppies, simply because neither one has yet learned the social niceties, and accidental injuries can be the result. No matter what age of dog you’re considering, make sure that children know how to treat them with kindness.

**Age**

There’s no doubt that puppies are adorable—but they’re also a handful. They chew, they bark and yip and bite, they pee and poop in the house, and they’re usually wild as a March hare.

Between six and eighteen months a dog goes through adolescence—and like human adolescents, dogs in this age range can be both awkward and extremely challenging. On the other hand, an adolescent dog has usually outlived the worst elements of the puppy stage, but is still young enough to be molded into the kind of dog that you and your family want.

Adult dogs are already settled into who they’re going to be, so you can be more assured that what you see is what you’re going to get. (Notice that I said “more” assured: you can never be one hundred percent positive that any particular dog will be perfectly suited to any particular living environment, whether they’re eight weeks or eight years old.)

And then there’s the senior dog, who can make a wonderful companion in those “golden years” of her life. Often, senior dogs involve less time, effort and energy than a younger one (especially a puppy!). Do keep in mind, however, that just as with older humans, you need to face the fact that a senior dog won’t be with you as long, and can be prone to developing a variety of health issues from arthritis to cancer that can seriously impact her quality of life and your own finances.

Now that you’ve decided what kind of dog you want, you need to find the right one. That’s the subject of next month’s column, so stay tuned!

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