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Susan B. Fireman



Your First Puppy or A. Little Common Sense Goes A Long Way

By Susan B. Fireman

Okay, you promised the kids, and now they're nagging you, and you're really tired of constantly hearing those same three words, "But you promised!" So off you go to find a puppy. But which one?

The little Terrier who jumps up and licks your nose. Or that sad looking Beagle with the pleading eyes that say, "Please take me." Or maybe it's a Rottweiler to guard your house...just in case.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple considering the choice you make can be the difference between having a wonderful or not so wonderful companion for years to come. So what do you do? First, list the breeds you think would be right for you. Then check out their characteristics, temperament, and what the dog was bred to do. A good source is the American Kennel Club's website; wee.akc.org. Also, ask other dog owners about their dog's best and worse traits as well as any health issues that may be unique to that breed. And while we're on the subject of health, check with some veterinarians practicing in your area. Ask their opinions regarding the breeds health and temperament, and of course, get the names of breeders in your area. That information is also available on the AKC website.

When you visit a breeder, remember all puppies are cute so always ask to see the parents. If you had your heart set on an Irish Wolf Hound you may reconsider after seeing the size of a fully grown adult. Before making a final decision, try to speak to an experienced dog trainer as they can help; you determine which breed of choice is best for you and if you are what's best for the dog.

A good match makes for good companionship which goes both ways. For instance, if you decide on a high-energy dog bred to herd sheep, don't expect a docile lap dog, happy with a quick walk around the block and a treat. Without an outlet for its energy, your little puppy may spend its days dashing madly from

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room to room trying to herd your family. Not good for you and certainly not fair to the dog.

Before you make your decision, do your homework, take your time, and be absolutely sure the puppy you choose is the dog you will want to live with for years to come. If your interest is not necessarily a breed, there are many mixed breeds needing homes found at shelters who make wonderful companions, but that's another topic for another time.

Susan Fireman is a well-known Animal Behavior Specialist. She teaches in the tri-state area. Her A.K.C. Champion German Shepherd dogs have ranked nationally in the top ten in their A. K C. Obedience Class.

Susan can be reached By Phone at 518-398-5249 or

By Email at Solanina@aol.com



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