

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



CARING FOR YOUR PUPPY



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Taking on a puppy is a huge responsibility – both for you, and your family. After all, the dog may be with you for 15 years or more. Before taking on a puppy, think about the long term commitment you are making.



Is there time for a dog in your home and your life?

A puppy needs regular and adequate meals, regular exercise in a safe place, to be clean and comfortable, veterinary care whenever needed, training and socialisation.

Looking for your puppy

Before starting, consider these points.

- Time – puppies need lots of time, and this continues throughout the dog's life – exercise, trips to the vet, grooming, training and play.
- Cost – not just to acquire your puppy, but for vet's bills, kennelling costs, food costs and so on throughout the dog's life.
- What sort of dog would suit my lifestyle? This is the most important (and most difficult) question to answer.

Acquiring your puppy

Before you get a puppy, ask yourself: "Do I want a crossbreed or pedigree?" If you would like a particular breed, then research carefully – there are many breeds and many breeders. There are also many books and magazines devoted to providing information to prospective owners, so do your homework. Never buy a puppy from a pet shop, and avoid breeders who offer many different breeds – reputable breeders specialise. Pedigree puppies can be expensive – usually several hundred pounds for most breeds.

See the puppy with the mother and litter-mates, and preferably in a home environment. A puppy's early experiences are important, so look for a puppy brought up around people rather than in a kennel.

Crossbred puppies present different challenges to pedigrees. Obviously the pup's parentage is important, so do try to see the mother. If adopting from a charity such as The Blue Cross, this might not be possible, so take advice from staff who work with the puppy.

Remember, charities such as The Blue Cross frequently have puppies looking for good homes, but always have adult dogs in need of loving homes too. An adult dog may suit your lifestyle better. (*See the All About Pets leaflet, Choosing the Right Dog (D1).*)

Health

A healthy puppy has bright eyes and a shiny coat. Avoid listless or potbellied puppies. Many pedigrees suffer from inherited conditions such as hip dysplasia, so make sure the parents have been tested – a reputable breeder will volunteer this information, less scrupulous ones might not.

When you have your puppy, make an appointment for a check-up with the vet as soon as possible. If there are health problems, immediately get in touch with the breeder or charity you got the puppy from.

A friendly puppy?

Puppies – as with most children – should be interested and playful. Although they sleep for long periods, do watch out for those that are sleepy all the time, or those that are overly nervous.



Feeding your puppy

Puppies should leave their mothers when around eight weeks old. Feed the diet they are used to at first, and introduce any new food gradually, but always use a food suitable for the puppy's breed and size. Several small meals are better than fewer large ones. Always make sure fresh water is available. Never give milk. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when feeding, and do not allow your puppy to become fat – obesity is a problem for dogs just as much as for humans.

Vaccinations and worming

Rescue centres and reputable breeders will probably have commenced a course of vaccinations and can give you a vet's certificate – they will probably also have started a worming programme too. Vaccinations and worming are essential, so consult your vet for advice.

Going home

A day or two before collection, take a blanket to place in the puppy's bed, then, when you take the pup home, transfer the blanket to the puppy's new bed – your puppy will feel at home. Also, make sure you have food and water bowls, grooming equipment and plenty of toys – play is an essential part of growing up.

Chewing is a natural pastime for puppies, so do not discourage your pet, just ensure you let the puppy chew things you have chosen, rather than your shoes. Rawhide chews, nylon bones and large hard biscuits are ideal. If the puppy does chew something inappropriate, distract your pet by arranging for something interesting to happen elsewhere and then give something else to chew. Your puppy might need to be taught to chew so, to do this, play with the chew in an enticing way until the puppy begins to chew.

The best place for your puppy's bed is a draught-free corner of the kitchen. Kitchens tend to be warm and to have washable floors. Remember the bed is your puppy's refuge, so keep young children away from it, and never allow a tired puppy to be dragged out of bed to play – your pet is not a toy!

On the first few nights in your home, expect your puppy to whimper. Before you go to bed, play with your puppy to induce sleep. After the first few nights, the pup should settle quite happily. Also take your pet out to the garden to spend a penny (with plenty of praise when it happens). Put paper on the floor for your puppy to use as a toilet.

If you do have problems with your puppy making noise, there is an alternative approach. For the first few nights, keep your puppy in your bedroom, in a high-sided box so there is no chance to get out. Any noise can be quietened by a few kind words or a reassuring pat. After a few nights the puppy will be used to being away from litter-mates and can be moved into the kitchen. This method may also help the housetraining process as the puppy can be taken out if the need arises in the night.

In the morning take your puppy straight out to go to the toilet and praise when the pup “performs”. Do not be angry if your pup has toileted overnight, but do praise when there is no mess. Always give lots of praise when your puppy goes in the right place – and make sure you take your pup back there whenever the animal looks likely to go.

Learning to be a good dog

Socialisation is vital if your puppy is to grow up as a well-adjusted member of your family, so try to expose your puppy to as many new experiences as possible – travel by car and by bus, for example. Vacuum cleaners, traffic, radio and television are all noises the puppy will have to get to know. It is possible to overwhelm the puppy, however, so do be careful. *For further information, see the All About Pets leaflet, Socialising (D17).*

Your puppy needs to mix with other animals as soon as possible. Although it is unsafe to mix with strange dogs until fully vaccinated, your puppy can meet dogs you know are healthy. Friends’ and relations’ dogs are useful. Do not allow them to play rough games, and allow the older dog to be left in peace if your puppy does not wish to play. Do not leave your puppy unattended with a strange dog or child. There are many puppy classes (animal charities, dog wardens and vets all have details) so do join one. Classes are fun for all the family, and an excellent way of learning how to do it right.

Your pup also needs to meet children, but make sure the children understand the ground rules first – your puppy is not a toy. The children must learn not to tease or bully the pup, and the animal must learn not to jump up or nip during play.

Next steps

A collar and tag are essential – we recommend microchipping, but it is still a legal requirement for your dog to have a collar and tag as well. Remember to check the fit of the collar regularly – puppies grow quickly and the collar can become too tight!

Regular grooming is essential to keep your dog in good condition, and is also a good way of showing affection. Teeth brushing is also important, as dental disease is common in

dogs. Do not use toothpaste for humans on your dog – vets have canine products available. Grooming and teeth brushing, if started young enough, will be fun for both you and your puppy.

Male dogs can be neutered between seven and ten months of age, and bitches after their first season; neutering prevents unwanted litters and avoids other health problems. Your vet will give you advice.

Veterinary treatment can be expensive, so we recommend that you take out insurance. There are many schemes available, so speak to your vet and get as much background information as you can. Some breeders and animal charities give free insurance for a limited period when you take on your puppy.

Finally

With correct planning and care, your puppy will give you and your family many years of pleasure and enjoyment, and will help you teach your children to be responsible.

If at any time you are experiencing difficulties, seek advice, either from The Blue Cross directly, or by visiting our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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