Puppy BUYER'S GUIDE

FINDING THE DOG OF YOUR DREAMS

YOU'VE DECIDED THAT YOU want to bring a dog into your life, to have a furry bundle of unconditional love greet you at the door every day. But before you leap into the joys and responsibilities of caring for a canine companion, you want to be sure you find the right dog and make the most of your relationship with your new family member.

There's a lot to think about even before you bring your new friend home. Are you prepared for the challenges of raising a puppy? Do you have a realistic idea of what it will cost to care for a companion animal? Have you determined which breed of dog fits best with your lifestyle? These are all questions that you should answer before making the decision to adopt a particular animal.

Even if you know what you're looking for in a canine companion, you may not be aware that abusive *puppy mills* (breeding operations that keep dogs in cages and breed them repeatedly) often sell puppies through pet stores, the Internet, even the local newspaper's classified ads. Puppy mill operators have been shown to repeatedly lie about their operations to inquiring consumers. What's more, dogs bred in puppy mills frequently suffer from health and behavioral problems that can be linked to the horrendous conditions in which they were born.

Picking the Right Puppy

Choosing the right dog generally means identifying an animal who matches your lifestyle and wants. A dog's size, exercise requirements, friendliness, and compatibility with children should all figure into your decision.

Dogs fall into two categories: purebreds and mixed breeds. Most animal shelters have plenty of both. The only significant difference between the two is that purebreds, because their parents and other ancestors are all members of the same breed, are similar to a specific "breed standard."

This means that if you adopt a purebred puppy, you have a good chance of knowing about how big the animal will get and what general physical and behavioral characteristics the animal will have.

Of course, the size, appearance, and temperament of most mixed breed dogs can be predicted as well. After all, mixed breeds are simply combinations of different breeds.

The Joys of Full-Grown Pets

Sure, puppies are adorable. But like most baby animals, baby dogs require an extensive commitment of time and energy from their guardians. For many people, busy schedules and work commitments prevent them from being able to provide the kind of round-the-clock care that younger animals need.

While pint-sized pooches may seduce any animal lover, it's important to remember that baby animals quickly become adults. Before giving in to the pull of a puppy, adopters need to remember that every animal up for adoption used to be a baby—and that adult animals can be every bit as sweet, cute, and playful as their younger counterparts. From teenagers to seniors, more mature pets give you all the benefits of companionship without the very special needs of puppies. And don't believe the myths that you'll have a better bond if you get your dog while the animal is a pup or that you have to have a young puppy in order to train the animal properly. Both myths, say the pet experts at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), are just that—*myths*. You really *can* teach an old dog new tricks (and rules).

For Kathy McDonnell, behavior manager at the Monadnock Humane Society in Swanzey, New Hampshire, and proud parent of a recently adopted 10-year-old Dalmatian, mature animals fit her lifestyle. "For me, an older dog is a much better option as I work long hours and [older dogs] just don't need as much exercise and stimulation as the younger guys do. Typically, the older dogs are already housebroken and have passed the destructive chewing phase."

Adult dogs are often more practical for families with children. Bringing together young animals and kids can be problematic, as puppies sometimes exhibit playful nipping and clawing, which can injure or frighten children. And kids can inadvertently be too rough with young animals. Adopting a mature dog who interacts well with children may be the best option.

Helping a homeless animal will always be a natural high for adopters. But those who choose to adopt an adult pet can take extra comfort in knowing that they're giving a home to an animal who might otherwise be overlooked. As pets age, they tend to have an increasingly hard time finding an adoptive family. For many adopters, giving an older animal a home is an act of compassion.

While a mature dog may be less demanding than a puppy, the animal will still need you to be responsible and devoted—all pets require a lifelong commitment.

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Kennel Club Papers Don't Guarantee Health

Many people mistakenly believe that purchasing puppies with "papers" from a dog registry ensures that the dogs have healthy bloodlines and came from responsible breeders. Unfortunately, dog registry documentation doesn't prove health or humane care at all.

Various kennel clubs issue purebred papers to identify dogs' parents and dates of birth. But even the American Kennel Club (AKC), the largest and most well-known registry, notes that registration "in no way indicates the quality or state of health of the dog." Neither does registration indicate that a dog came from a compassionate breeder. But many unscrupulous breeders and pet shops exploit this common misperception.

If you're seeking a purebred puppy, consult local shelters and breed rescue groups for information about responsible local breeders

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rather than relying on registry papers or empty proclamations of quality and health from puppy sellers. And before you buy a dog, read the purchase contract carefully. Many contracts clearly state that purchasers are "on their own" once a sale is complete or note that the breeder will provide a replacement puppy for one who becomes ill. This sort of contract is a safe bet for mass breeders because they know that most people would never give up a dog after they've taken the animal home with them.

World Wide Puppies

You think you've found the perfect breeder online. The website is filled with pictures of cute puppies, claims of how much the breeder adores the "furry babies," and warnings that the breeder only sells to "qualified homes." In short, everything feels right about this place. But beware—such websites are one of puppy mills' newest scams, and there's no way to know by looking at a website or talking to someone on the telephone whether you're dealing with a puppy mill or not.

Websites allow puppy mills to cut out the middleman by selling directly to the consumer. Not only is this more profitable, in most states it enables puppy mills to avoid being inspected by government agencies.

Websites loaded with pictures of adorable puppies and promises of a loving home may seem like an ideal spot to find the right pet for your family. But puppy mills keep dogs in deplorable conditions—forcing them to churn out puppies for quick sale and shipment—and your purchase could be supporting cruelty.

Why Pet Stores Aren't Good Choices

While it may not be obvious, puppy mills all too often lie behind the friendly façade of pet stores. Puppy mills are breeding facilities that raise dogs in shockingly poor conditions. "Breeding stock" animals are caged and continually bred for years, without human companionship and with little hope of ever becoming part of a family. After their fertility wanes, these animals may be killed, abandoned, or sold to another mill. The result of all this breeding is hundreds of thousands of puppies, many with severe behavior and health problems.

There's only one sure way to combat the tragedy of puppy mills—don't support them. No matter how cute the puppy in the pet store is, please don't buy the animal. Making such a purchase doesn't "rescue" the puppy—it simply frees space for another to be bred and sold. Unless you personally visit the location where your puppy was born and raised—and where the parents live—there's no way to know that

THINKING IT THROUGH

Before you make the commitment of bringing a new furry family member into your life, please take a moment to think over the following questions. Making sure you know the answers will be in the best interests of the animal and your family.

Why Do You Want a Dog?

It's amazing how many people fail to ask themselves this simple question *before* they bring home their new pets. Adopting a dog because the kids have been pining for a puppy can end up being a big mistake. Pets may be with you 10, 15, or even 20 years.

Do You Have Time for a Pet?

Dogs can't be ignored just because you're tired or busy. They require food, water, exercise, care, and companionship every day of every year. Many dogs in U.S. animal shelters are there because their owners didn't realize how much time it took to care for them.

Can You Afford a Pet?

The costs of pet ownership can be quite high. Licenses, training classes, spaying and neutering, veterinary care, grooming, toys, food, and other expenses add up quickly.

Are You Prepared to Deal with Special Problems?

Flea infestations, scratched-up furniture, accidents from animals who aren't yet housetrained, and unexpected medical emergencies are unfortunate but common aspects of pet ownership.

Can You Have a Pet Where You Live?

Many rental communities don't allow pets, and those that do frequently have restrictions. Make sure you know what they are *before* you bring a companion animal home.

Is It a Good Time for You to Adopt a Dog?

If you're a student, in the military, or travel frequently as part of your work, waiting until you settle down is wise and may be the best choice for you right now. Ask about volunteering at your local shelter if you need a "fur fix."

Are Your Living Arrangements Suitable for the Animal?

Animal size is not the only variable to consider. For example, some small dogs such as terriers are very active—they require a great deal of exercise and may bark at any noise. On the other hand, some big dogs are quite content to lie on a couch all day. Before adopting a pet, do some research to find an animal who will fit into your lifestyle and living arrangements.

Who Will Care for Your Dog While You're Away?

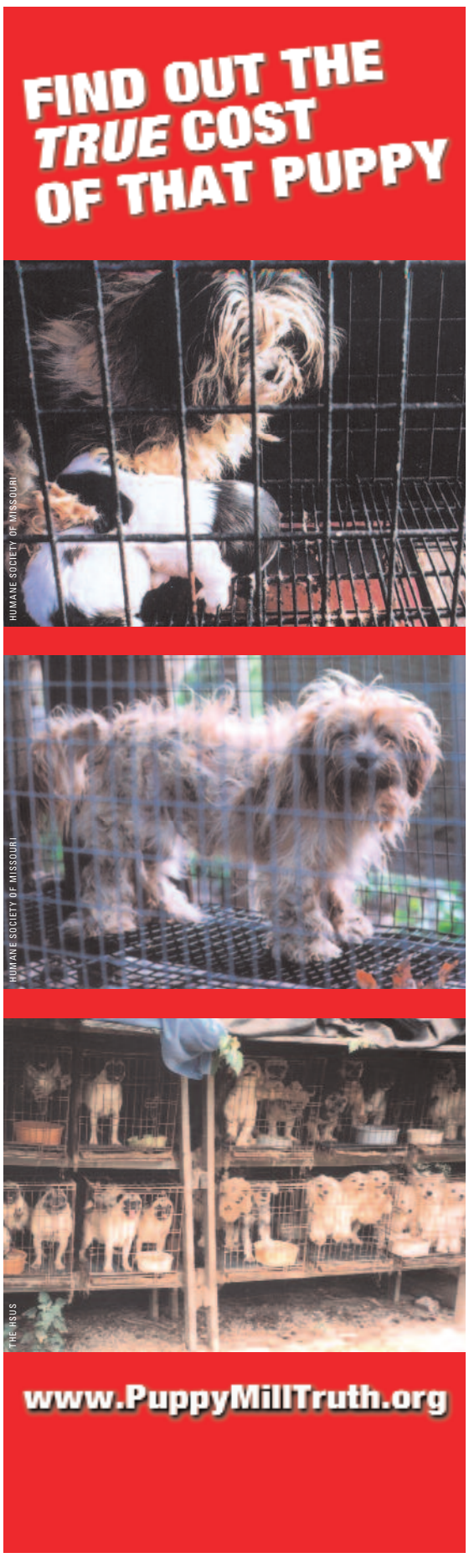
You'll need either reliable friends and neighbors or money to pay for a boarding kennel or pet-sitting service.

Will You Be a Responsible Pet Owner?

Having your dog spayed or neutered, obeying community leash and licensing laws, and keeping identification tags on your pet are part of being a responsible owner. Giving your pet love, exercise, a healthy diet, and regular veterinary care are other essentials.

Are You Prepared to Provide Care for Life?

Remember that you're making a commitment to care for your pet throughout the animal's entire lifetime.



HOW MUCH DOES THAT DOGGY **REALLY** COST?

The costs of dog care can add up quickly, so it's important to ask yourself if you can afford a pet before you bring your new best friend home. Shelter adoption fees are much less than the purchase price of a puppy, and your new dog will most likely be vaccinated, health checked, and already spayed or neutered.

What Start-Up Costs Should You Expect?

Dogs need to be vaccinated, spayed or neutered, and often dewormed. During their intensive growth period, puppies require a series of examinations and vaccinations. The one-time cost of spaying or neutering your pet is a small price to pay for the health benefits it pays back. Sterilized pets tend to be calmer and will not develop reproductive organ problems.

The cost of spaying or neutering depends on the sex, size, and age of your pet, your veterinarian's fees, and other variables. If money is an obstacle to having your pet sterilized, consider the cost of caring for an entire litter.

Can You Afford a Pet?

Apart from routine veterinary costs such as yearly exams, vaccinations, and heartworm prevention medication, you'll need to pay for a collar, identification tags, a leash, required licensing, spay or neuter surgery, training classes, brushes and combs, food, food and water bowls, toys, flea control, a bed, pet sitting and boarding kennel fees, any medical emergency treatments, grooming, nail clippers, and other pet necessities.

The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association estimates the average yearly cost of keeping a dog to be more than $1,200. It's a good idea to set up a pet emergency fund and put aside $25 a month or choose pet insurance that will cover major veterinary expenses.

Don't adopt a pet without taking inventory of the costs and your ability to pay them. You can't calculate the value of your relationship with your pet, but you *can* put a price tag on pet care.

The Tragedy of Puppy Mills

When Pat Manzella bought Bella Mia—a sweet Yorkshire terrier—from a pet store, she didn't foresee the tragedy that awaited her new puppy. Although Bella Mia was lucky enough to have a devoted caregiver, a nice home and yard, and all the toys and tidbits a dog could want, she was the victim of bad breeding at a puppy mill that had been repeatedly cited for Animal Welfare Act (AWA) violations. The puppy was born with a serious condition that would cause her death in six months.

During her first veterinarian visit, Bella Mia was diagnosed with kennel cough and put on an antibiotic. When additional visits and stronger antibiotics failed to cure the cough and the puppy became lethargic, Manzella sought further veterinary treatment. She learned that her new companion might have a portosystemic shunt, a condition in which blood flows abnormally around the liver instead of through it. Surgery was scheduled but, sadly, Bella Mia died because of the stress on her severely weakened system.

The pet store was less than sympathetic about Bella Mia's death. While it ultimately refunded most of the puppy's purchase price, the store would not reimburse Manzella for the roughly $2,000 she had spent on veterinary care.

With help from The HSUS, Manzella identified the facility where Bella Mia was bred in Missouri and contacted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—which enforces the AWA—to ensure that the breeding facility was inspected. Previous inspection records from the facility illuminated its shocking conditions: one inspector requested that dogs "must have the chains cut off their necks and the necks must be treated where the skin has been broken." Another record stipulated that "the small Dachshund with the broken back must be treated or euthanized."

While the USDA finally took action against the Missouri puppy mill, it amounted only to limiting the number of animals that could be housed at the kennel and an $8,000 fine.

PAT MANZELLA

These days Manzella is spreading the word about puppy mills and warning people not to buy a dog from a pet store, doing her best to make sure that Bella Mia's short life was not in vain. Although she was deeply saddened by her puppy's suffering and loss, Manzella says, "I have no regrets; I'm just angry at all of the people who were responsible for what happened and didn't care." Find out what you can do to fight puppy mills at *www.StopPuppyMills.com.* ■

FINDING THE PERFECT PLACE TO FIND YOUR PUPPY

Once you start looking, you'll be amazed at the many places to get a puppy. Some sources are better than others. Often, the easiest place to get a puppy isn't the best place.

Finding a Puppy Who Needs You

Now that you're ready to adopt a dog, your local animal shelter may be your best bet for finding a suitable pet. Shelters generally have a great selection of animals for adoption, including puppies and purebred animals. On average, purebreds account for about 25–30 percent of the dogs in shelters.

There's usually nothing "wrong" with shelter animals. Many are there because people had unrealistic expectations of the time, effort, and money required to care for a pet. You can depend on responsible shelters to screen puppies for sound health and temperament. While caring for animals, staff and volunteers try to learn as much as they can about them.

Don't be discouraged if there are no animals of the breed or type you want on your first visit. Shelters receive new animals every day. Your shelter may agree to contact you when an animal matching your preference becomes available. In an effort to make good matches, many shelters provide adoption counseling and follow-up assistance, such as dog-training classes and behavior counseling.

Shelter adoption fees are usually much less than an animal's purchase price at a pet store or breeder. And your new pet is more likely to be vaccinated, dewormed, and already spayed or neutered.

National figures indicate that about half of the animals in shelters must be euthanized for lack of homes. So animals at your local shelter are just waiting for someone like you. To locate an animal shelter near you, check your local *Yellow Pages* directory under "animal shelter," "animal control," or "humane society." Or visit *www.Pets911.com* and *www.PetFinder.com*.

Adopting from a Breed Rescue Group

Breed rescue groups cater specifically to one breed or mixes of that breed. These groups vary in size from a few individuals to large established networks. They typically don't operate a "shelter," but instead keep animals in foster homes until they can be placed in loving, permanent homes.

Rescue groups get their animals through a number of places, including owners who can't keep them, partnerships with local shelters, failed breeding operations, or found strays. Adoption fees vary, depending on veterinary and other costs that the groups have already paid. Follow-up counseling is usually available.

To locate a rescue group that specializes in the breed of dog that interests you, contact your local animal shelter or the national breed club or visit *www.Pets911.com*. You also can call The HSUS at 202-452-1100—the staff will be happy to help you find a breed rescue group near you.

When you contact a breed rescue group, be sure to find out as much as you can about the group, how it cares for its animals, how it decides which animals are adoptable, and what other adoption and post-adoption services are available.

The HSUS

A COMPASSIONATE BREEDER

THE ONLY REAL WAY TO ENSURE you're working with a legitimate, responsible breeder is to visit the breeder's home and see the place where your future puppy—and his or her parents—live. Good breeders welcome visits and questions from prospective puppy buyers; good breeders don't sell puppies to people they haven't met and interviewed. Good breeders:

- Encourage you to spend time with the puppy's mother when you visit
- Breed only one or two types of dogs and are well-informed about breed standards

Responsible dog breeders keep their animals in their homes as part of their families; provide for their animals' emotional, behavioral, and physical needs; and put the dogs' interests above profit.

- Have strong relationships with local veterinarians and show you records of the puppies' veterinary visits
- Are well-versed in their breeds' potential genetic problems, have had the puppies' parents tested to make sure they're free of those defects, and provide proof of the test results to you
- Give guidance on caring for and training your puppy and are available for help after you take the dog home
- Provide references from other families who've purchased their puppies
- Keep dogs in their homes as a part of their families—not outside in kennel runs
- Feed their dogs premium food
- Don't always have puppies available but keep a list of interested people for the next available litter
- Work with local, state, and national clubs that specialize in their specific breeds and may even compete their animals in dog contests like con-formation, obedience, tracking, or agility trials
- Encourage visits and want your entire family to meet the puppy before you take your new pet home
- Provide written contracts and health guarantees—but keep in mind that good breeders should not require that you use specific veterinarians

For a complete checklist of things to look for in a good breeder, visit *www.PuppyBuyersGuide.org*.

Website Reference Guide

General pet care
www.hsus.org/pets

Getting a puppy
www.PuppyBuyersGuide.org

Pet friendly rental housing
www.RentWithPets.org

Pet behavior problems, allergies to pets, pets and babies, and more
www.PetsForLife.org

Adoptable pets in your area
www.Pets911.com and *www.PetFinder.com*

Puppy mills
www.StopPuppyMills.com

Dog bite prevention
www.NoDogBites.org

HELPING PEOPLE AND PETS FOR LIFE

THE COMPANION ANIMALS STAFF of The HSUS is committed to finding innovative ways to keep pets and their people together. The HSUS maintains dozens of programs designed to protect the dogs, cats, and other pets who share our lives and homes. The organization works with the general public and the animal protection community to reduce pet overpopulation and helps people become more responsible and empowered pet owners through the Pets for Life® program.

The HSUS also provides advice, support, and guidance to shelter workers and other professionals who have hands-on responsibility for millions of animals through a host of programs, including the bimonthly *Animal Sheltering*® magazine and the annual Animal Care Expo educational conference. The HSUS also investigates and exposes exploitive industries such as puppy mills, greyhound racing, and horse slaughter. To learn more about The HSUS's work to protect companion animals, visit *www.hsus.org/pets* or *www.petsforlife.org*.

Nation's Portal for Lost & Found Pets, Pet Adoptions and Pet Resources

Pets911®

PETS911.com

PETS 911: A Public Service To Save Healthy, Adoptable Pets

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