

Do You Really Want a Puppy?

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Puppies are cute, active, playful... and did I mention cute? But is a puppy really ideal for your lifestyle?

Many people think “puppy” when they begin to consider getting a dog. However, this is certainly not the only, nor necessarily the best, option. For one thing, getting a puppy from just anywhere is not the best idea. You don’t know what this animal will grow into: a big dog, or small? Will it have aggressive tendencies? Health problems? Was it properly socialized during the all-important 7 - 12 week period, or was it cooped up, causing what could become permanent behavioral problems?

Although these are all important considerations when looking for a puppy, it’s just as important to pay attention to your lifestyle and decide whether you will be giving a puppy a good home. Many people have a perfectly acceptable lifestyle for an adult dog that would be an unacceptable one for a puppy. This is due to the extra needs puppies have over adults. The most important question to consider is this: Will someone be home most of the day to supervise and socialize the puppy?

Just like small children, puppies should not be left alone for extended times, for both their physical and mental health. A puppy that is left home alone all day will turn into an undersocialized, understimulated adult and will likely develop quite a few behavior problems. A young dog that receives little attention will become a monster on the few occasions it gets it. In addition, while houstraining is possible even if no one’s home all day, it’s exceptionally difficult, and most people don’t plan on that kind of effort.

When you’re home, will you have the time and patience to gently guide your puppy’s behavior? You can train puppies using positive reinforcement at a very early age. 6 to 10 weeks, the time period most people get their puppies, is actually a great time to begin teaching commands, as well as an essential time to get your puppy out and used to the world. Aside from basic obedience and socialization, however, you need to constantly supervise your puppy while you’re home to make sure he doesn’t soil the house, chew on the wrong item, or get hurt. If you’re not watching your puppy, he should be put in a safe, confined area such as an exercise pen, which includes puppy pads in one corner.

If you don’t have the time or the willpower to spend most of your free time working with your puppy, you ought to consider an older, mellower dog that has already gone through puppy and adolescent stages. These dogs are less needy, will generally have fewer behavior problems to work through, can be trained “your way,” and can still be long-time companions.