



**The PEDIGREE  
Adoption Drive™**

**ADOPTION GUIDE**

A handbook for healthy pets  
from your friends at PEDIGREE® Brand.

## So, you want a dog...

There are currently four million dogs waiting to be adopted in shelters across the country. Approximately 25 percent of them are purebred. They all desperately deserve loving homes, but you can only open up yours to that one special dog.

But deciding to adopt is a huge responsibility — and not one to be taken lightly. There are many important factors to consider before deciding to adopt a dog.

## So where do you begin?

In this Adoption Guide, you'll learn all about the adoption process, what to consider, expect, and ask — and much more! It'll help you consider your decision from every angle, enabling you to make a truly informed choice.

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## Things to consider

### **Do you really, really want a dog?**

Do you want a dog? Do you really want a dog? Do you want to wake up early on a cozy Sunday morning, and take him out in the rain? After all, he needs his exercise. Are you ready to spend as much time as you can with him?

Are you prepared for the lifestyle impact, the financial impact, and grooming considerations? Hmmmm... Are you up for cleaning up various messes? Getting up in the middle of the night with a sick dog?

Whether it's a puppy, adult, or senior dog you're considering adopting, the newness soon wears off, and then you're left with a loving companion for, hopefully, many years to come.

### **PEDIGREE® Brand supports shelter dog adoption**

The overwhelming majority of dogs adopted from shelters aren't puppies. In fact, most are 2-3 years old, and up. So in this section we'll concentrate primarily on adult to older dogs, and their particular needs.

However, if you're looking to adopt a puppy from a shelter, much of this information will still be beneficial. And for more information specific to puppies, please visit the puppy section of Pedigree.com.

Anywhere you go, you'll find lots of shelter dogs in need of a good home. There are other benefits to adopting from a shelter. With a shelter adoption, you're saving more than one life — you're making room for another dog, or allowing another dog to be kept at a shelter for a longer period of time, giving them a better chance of being adopted, too.

Another rewarding aspect of shelter adoption is the special bond many owners develop with their rescued dog. Opening up your heart and home to an "orphan" usually results in an extremely strong relationship. That can mean a loyal, affectionate, and attentive dog for life.

Read on to "check" that your decision to adopt is a solid one.

### **Why do you want a dog?**

In deciding what type of dog you should get, consider what you're looking for in your future pet. Is he going to be a fun playmate for the children, or is his main job going to be to accompany an older person on quiet walks? Do you want him to go jogging with you, or is he going to be guarding the house? Loving him, and living with him should be rewarding for you and your newly adopted dog.

### **What kind of dog do you want?**

So what kind of dog do you want? You can definitely still consider particular breeds of dogs when you're thinking of adopting from a shelter. Many shelter dogs are not purebred, but mutts. But the shelter workers can take very educated guesses at their lineage.

Let's say you've always wanted a Lab. It's a good bet you'll find an adorable Lab-Rottie cross who'll display the physical and temperamental characteristics of both breeds. Or you might be looking for a "working" dog, but not in the market for a "hound" dog. The biggest trick is to be filled to the brim with knowledge before you hit the shelters — and before you fall in love with a gorgeous sweetie who just isn't right for you.

### **Time of your life**

For a dog waiting for his "forever" home, it's always a good time to be adopted. But don't let him down by bringing him home, and then deciding that it's simply not the right time for you. Dogs take lots of care and attention — and that means time — especially when they first come home.

Is this the right time in your life to take on this huge commitment? Does your lifestyle allow for the flexibility it takes to acclimate your new dog into your life? Are your current commitments overwhelming, or very manageable?

### **An ongoing financial commitment**

Are you financially in a place where you can afford the care and upkeep of a dog? Because it can really add up. Besides the cost of quality food, treats, and snacks, there are toys, doggie beds, and blankets; vet, training, and grooming costs; medical emergencies; and more.

## **Location, location, location**

Do you live in a house or apartment? The city, the suburbs, or somewhere rural? Let us be the first to dispel the myth that you can't raise a large dog in an apartment. It's nonsense. It doesn't really matter how big or small your apartment (or even your house) is — what matters is that you give your new dog the daily exercise he requires to stay healthy and happy.

Almost every book on dog breeds will give an indication of exercise requirements. As long as you hit the pavement and the park enough, your big dog will likely be happy lounging around your home. In fact, many small breeds (for example, Jack Russell Terriers) require more activity than large breeds.

## **It's all about activity needs**

As long as you take care of his exercise needs, the size of your home really doesn't matter — whether you're a city, suburb, or country-dweller. Of course, an off-leash park in a city is always great no matter where you reside. Areas designated for off-leash dogs give your dog the chance to romp around as much as he likes, play with other dogs, and fetch toys like Frisbees, Kongs, and tennis balls. Of course, these parks are only for trained, socialized, friendly dogs.

Additionally, dogs don't need a yard to thrive. In fact, they may soon get bored hanging out in the backyard. Yards smell the same every day and there aren't any new and stimulating experiences. It's much more fun and interesting to dogs to go out for walks (especially if you change your routes), or to dog parks, with you. This way they'll meet other people and dogs, and be excited by new environments.

## **Male or female — does it matter?**

Consider whether you want a male or female dog. Males tend to be more dominant and self-confident, whereas females may be more affectionate and home-loving. But, of course, these are very broad generalizations; every dog is different.

## **The adoption process**

You've thought about your lifestyle, possible breeds, gender, etc. So now it's time to learn a bit about the process of adopting a dog from a shelter. Every shelter's process varies a little, but each basically follows a similar path.

First, before you head out to the shelter, it's a good idea to have your home already prepared for his arrival — just in case. In addition, it's best if you've already purchased the items he'll need to make the smoothest possible transition.

## **Try, try again**

Then: You visit as many times as it takes to find "your" dog. Try not to go in expecting to find him the first time, because you may not. (Although it is difficult to leave without a new family member once you're there.) It's really important to find the right dog for you; and for you to be the right owner for him.

Bring a notepad and pen so you can write down pertinent information regarding the important questions you'll surely want to ask. And if you can, bring along a digital camera. Some shelters may not let you take shots of their dogs, but most will. Some time spent away from the shelter with your notes and some pictures may just make you go back to claim the dog that was meant to be forever yours.

## **Application to adopt**

Now, it's very easy to fall in love at first sight, but you should spend time with a dog before adopting him. Look for a dog who's happy and friendly, and avoid aggressive dogs. Many shelter dogs are energetic because they've been confined. If he seems "full of beans," it's no reason to rule him out. If you find one you think is meant for you, you'll set the "application to adopt" process in motion.

This involves some paperwork, including the most important document: the Adoption Questionnaire. This includes a wide range of questions, such as:

- What are your reasons for adopting?
- How many members live in your household?
- How much time do you spend away from your home daily?
- Where will your dog be kept at night?
- Do you rent or own an apartment or house?

- Do you have any other pets? Are they spayed or neutered; are they up to date on vaccinations?
- Have you ever dropped off a pet at a shelter? If so, what were the circumstances?
- Have you ever had pets? If so what happened to them?
- Do you plan to spay or neuter your dog? (Many shelters do this automatically; some don't.)
- Will you be taking him to obedience lessons?

Now, many of these queries may seem like an invasion of privacy, or worse, irrelevant to your particular situation. But keep in mind that the purpose of these questions is to place a dog in the best home for him, weed out people who will potentially abuse their dogs (use them for dog fights, etc.), and keep the chances of having the dog returned to the shelter as slim as possible. There's also a certain amount of leeway involved. It's definitely not an exact science.

## **Short interview**

After the paperwork is complete, a shelter worker will sit down with you and ask a series of questions based on the information you've provided. After that they may phone the other members of your household just to be sure they're really on board. Ultimately, if you're approved, you'll pay a fee (or a donation); sometimes you'll be asked to sign an Adoption Agreement, which is like a contract.

And then — unless he needs to be spayed or neutered first — you can take your very grateful new dog home immediately!

## **Gut feeling**

Adopting a dog is a serious years-long commitment. That's why the process is so involved. If you're having second thoughts at any point, listen to your instinct and walk away until you're 100% sure.

## **Asking questions**

Be ready to find out everything you can about your potential new dog. Before you hit the shelters, make up a list of possible questions, including:

- Why is he available for adoption?
- Do you know anything about his history?
- Is he housebroken?
- Was he ever returned after an adoption? If so, why?
- What's his temperament like?
- Does he have any behavioral problems?
- How is he with children, cats, and other dogs?
- Is he neutered; is she spayed?
- Are his vaccinations up-to-date?
- Does he have, or has he had, any illnesses?
- Is he on any medication?
- What's his approximate age?
- What are his grooming requirements?
- What are his exercise requirements?
- What commands does he know?
- Does he walk well on his leash?

Take notes while you're at the shelter. It can only take one wrong answer to make him the wrong dog for you; and you the wrong owner for him. Again, if you're not 100% sold, go home and ponder your notes until you're absolutely sure that he's the one.

## **Preparing your home**

Your adopted dog is the newest member of your family. However, the key to a happy transition — for you, your family, and your new dog — is preparation. Read on to begin thinking about preparing for your new dog's arrival.

Before he makes his grand entrance, buy all the toys and equipment you'll need (such as collar and leash, bowls, brush and comb, and crate) and choose a nutritionally complete, age-appropriate dog food. You'll also need some no-odor spray for quick clean-ups.

If you're prepared, you can focus all your attention on easing his transition. Bear in mind that for your new dog, this change in his life — however exciting — will be somewhat stressful. Here are some early steps you can take to make sure everything goes smoothly.

## **Safety first**

Dog proof your home and immediately get him a license, identification tag, and have him micro-chipped. It's also a good idea to take a photo of him. The photo may come in handy in case you need to make a "dog missing" poster — and this can happen to even the most conscientious owner.

## **Proper introductions**

If you have children, they'll naturally want to play and pet their new dog. Be careful about this at first. Give your dog a place of his own — a crate for example — where no one will bother him; a place where he can relax and have time on his own. As he gets used to his surroundings, he'll begin to actively seek out contact with you and other members of your household.

## **House rules**

Make sure everyone in the household knows what the house rules will be now that you've brought your dog home. For example, decide whether he'll be allowed on the couch, and stick to your rules at all times.

Your new adult dog will be happy for the chance to become part of your household, and giving him clear behavior guidelines from the beginning helps him understand what's expected of him so he can settle more easily into your home. Most dogs take about a month or so to feel comfortable in a new home — establishing and following a routine are the best ways to make this happen.

## **A den of one's own**

Find a warm place, and make it just for him. If you want to use a crate, set his bed up in it and leave the door open. You may want to buy a special, hard-vinyl dog bed. Baskets made from any material can be used for older dogs that have no chewing issues. Some dogs love crates, some don't. Some will even search around and "choose" where they want their den, like in the bathroom or a nook in the kitchen.

## **His "stuff"**

When he first comes home, he may run around exploring and sniffing, he may cry and paw at things, or he may even flop down and settle in for a good long nap. Whatever he does, have things ready for him so that he begins to get the idea that your home is his new home, and along with the deal comes some great stuff — and it's just for him!

Show him his food and water bowl, his toys, his bed, his crate, and anything else you've prepared for him. Find out what he was fed in the shelter. It's best to maintain the same diet for a few days at least, before gradually transitioning him to the diet you've chosen.

If he's having a hard time and feels disoriented, things like toys and his own den may sooth him. If possible, bring something of his from the shelter. Something with a familiar scent will comfort him during his first night.

## **Outdoor housing**

If you live outside the city, a dog house may be a good idea. The house should be about double the width of the adult, fully grown dog. As far as dog houses go, bigger is not better. To keep him warm, the house needs to be small enough to trap his body heat. It should be large enough for him to comfortably stand up, lie down, and turn around.

It's very important that it's dry and raised from the ground. Ideally the roof or one of the sides should be hinged to allow easy cleaning. And the house should also be sheltered from the wind. Try placing a heavy flap over the entrance; it'll keep him even warmer.

Put down some clean, fresh-smelling hay or straw as his bedding (about five inches thick) and replace it when it starts to smell musty. Don't line a dog's house with blankets and quilts as they trap moisture and can give your dog a chill. Check to see if your area has laws in effect that regulate the dimensions of a dog house.

## **As time goes on**

When he first comes home, don't worry if you don't have everything and the kitchen sink set up for him. As he gets used to things, as you begin to know him, and as you gain more knowledge about dogs, you'll know what you still need to purchase to

keep him healthy and happy. Much observation and trial-and-error are in order.

Soon you'll know what kind of toys he prefers (both for inside and outside play), what treats he adores, if he'll sleep in his carefully purchased bed or beside it; if he has the occasional accident.

You may find that even though he seems to have a lush coat, he still shivers and needs to wear a dog sweater. Or that he refuses to wear doggie boots and needs a special pad cream to protect his tender tootsies from the ice and salt in the winter months. Every day, you'll enjoy the discoveries you'll make together.

Welcoming an adult dog into your home takes some time and patience, but it's well worth it. If you're careful about choosing your dog, he'll make a great addition to your family for many happy years to come.

## Responsible dog ownership

Dogs are wonderful companions but they require some work and a great deal of responsibility. Although each dog (and owner) is different, there are some common grounds that constitute responsible dog ownership.

### **Training your dog**

A dog who's been taught a few simple rules will become a well-adjusted and well-behaved family pet. If your newly adopted dog doesn't have his commands down, now's as good a time as any to remedy that!

Your new addition needs to be taught manners and the rules of the household. From the time you bring him home from the shelter, he must be taught not to bite or chew humans — even in play. He must be taught that unnecessary barking is not allowed.

The key to training a dog of any age is to realize that he really does want to please you. Praise and reward your dog for appropriate behavior and use a stern "No" command when you wish to correct his behavior.

If it's more than you can handle on your own, find an obedience class or a trainer. Many vets and pet supply stores offer training classes. This will provide instruction on training your dog to obey basic commands such as stay, down, and to come when called, but also allow him to socialize with other dogs.

### **On grooming**

Regular grooming is a must to keep your dog looking and feeling his best. Naturally, long-haired or densely coated breeds require brushing more frequently than short haired dogs. Some breeds require regular professional clipping. Your veterinarian can assist with cutting nails and cleaning teeth, and show you how to do some of this yourself.

A regular grooming ritual is also a great bonding experience for you and your new dog, especially if he hasn't been treated well in his past. It feels good, and it shows him how much you love and appreciate him.

### **Walk the walk**

As a general rule, dogs need regular walking for physical and mental stimulation. When walking your dog he should be kept on a leash and you must observe all local regulations.

Comply with the regulations concerning registering your dog with your local authorities and be sure that your dog wears his license tag and identification at all times.

Your dog should never be allowed to wander or roam freely.

### **Stoop & scoop**

As a responsible dog owner, you should always carry plastic bags when you walk your dog. A good way to remember to do this is to purchase a small, but durable "dog bag" and hang it in the same place as your dog's leash.

The bag might contain a supply of poop-scoop bags, maybe a toy for the park, some grooming implements, and some emergency cash. It's also a good place for your keys and cell phone, if you have one. Once you get into the habit of bringing your dog bag whenever you take him out, you'll rarely forget.

## **Lost dogs**

Unfortunately dogs sometimes do get lost, and it can be heartbreaking. But also quite easily preventable. You can help prevent this by making sure your dog always wears a collar and an identification tag with your telephone number. For extra insurance you can get him micro-chipped at your vet's. Be sure he always wears his matching microchip ID with his other tags.

Confine your dog during thunderstorms and fireworks displays. If your dog is lost check with your neighbors, local veterinary clinics, animal welfare organizations, and shelters. Check with these organizations in the neighboring suburbs, also — lost animals may travel some distance.

If he's been micro-chipped, contact the company he's registered with. And continue to contact all of these locations daily until your dog is found.

## **Away from home**

Although many people prefer not to part with their pets during holidays, sometimes it can't be avoided. So you need to consider how best to care for your dog while you're away. Your veterinarian should be able to recommend a few reputable kennels. Make preparations well in advance for major holidays.

In order to kennel your dog, his vaccinations must be up to date. If you're only absent for a few days you may arrange for a neighbor or a home pet sitting service to visit and feed your dog. Some companies provide all inclusive services. They'll live in your home and take care of your dog while you're away.

## **Dogs & kids**

A dog can truly be a child's best friend if the child and the dog are taught how to play together.

Running and chasing games with children and the dog should always be supervised by an adult until an understanding has developed between the dog and child. Most dogs are loyal and trustworthy companions but if your dog is not used to children, he should be introduced to them under careful supervision.

## **Additional resources**

For more information about dog ownership and the adoption process, check out your local library or visit [www.pedigree.com](http://www.pedigree.com) or [www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org).