

S H I N E

Dog Individuality

Choosing the right dog

A playful, energetic and outgoing dog that loves vigorous exercise and needs lots of mental stimulation, isn't likely to be suited to someone living a quiet life in an apartment that only has time for short walks.


As personality and behaviour are affected by environmental factors (nurture), where you get your dog from should be an important consideration. Choose a seller who has created an environment conducive to a healthy, happy upbringing or living situation. This is particularly important as unwanted behaviour is a common reason why dogs are surrendered or abandoned which may result from several factors, including their upbringing, poor socialisation and negative life experiences.



Your dog's needs

It is important you are clear on what you want in a canine companion, whether the dog you have selected has those attributes and how you can best meet your dog's needs. For instance, a 60kg long-haired, territorial Maremma sheepdog may look appealing but will require a huge amount of commitment, skill, the right environment and dedication to optimally meet their individual needs.

Consider whether you can meet the needs of the dog which will be in part determined by their personality. If not, your dog will suffer poor emotional wellbeing, which can manifest as unwanted behaviours. Such behaviours can also result in the inability to form a bond with your dog, leading to a further deterioration in their emotional wellbeing. Additionally, unwanted behaviour is a common reason why dogs are surrendered or abandoned.

A white Maremma sheepdog is sitting in a snowy field. In the background, several sheep are visible. The dog is looking directly at the camera. The scene is set in a winter environment with snow on the ground and some dry leaves scattered around.

You may like the look of a certain dog or the idea of certain behavioural traits but ask yourself whether in reality these really suit your lifestyle

For more information on choosing the right dog for your family visit:

<https://www.waltham.com/resources/dog-care>



The best places to look for a dog are:

- **A registered breeder**
- **A registered dog shelter or adoption centre/organisation**

It's usually best to avoid:

- **Commercial breeding facilities**
(also known as 'puppy mills' or 'puppy farms')
- **Pet shops**

Ideally, you should choose a dog from an environment that considers a wide variety of factors such as welfare, wellbeing, health, disease prevention (including responsible breeding and preventive care for both the parents and offspring), temperament, socialisation and genetic screening. The current owners should also prioritise matching dogs and responsible families with well-suited lifestyles, and appropriate resident household pets.

Choosing the right dog from a breeder

It's crucial to find an ethical and responsible breeder who prioritises breeding for good health and temperament, and creates a living environment that fosters healthy development. Such breeders will perform genetic testing to screen parents for heritable health conditions and practice preventive care for both the parents and offspring. The breeder should have provided adequate and appropriate socialisation, as well as adequate nutrition and good enriching experiences for the puppies too.

If possible, meet the puppy's parents, as well as dogs from previous litters to gain more of an understanding on health and temperament of your prospective dog. Not all breeders will meet these requirements, so it's important to do your research before you consider purchasing a puppy. First-time hobby breeders or those who have had an 'accidental' litter of puppies, for example, are less likely to have performed genetic screening tests prior to breeding and may not be aware of the importance of early socialisation.

The breeder should ask questions about you as well, to match the dog with the right family





Choosing the right dog from a shelter or adoption centres

Giving a dog a home who has been previously owned can be very rewarding. There is likely to be a rigorous process of assessing the compatibility between a dog and a potential family. Most modern adoption centres use personality and temperament testing to try to predict if a dog is likely to be suitable for adoption and what kind of family the dog might be the best match for. Keep in mind that behaviour in a shelter may be different than behavior in a home. Safety around cats and other animals is particularly important as some dogs have a high 'prey drive' and are more likely to chase or attack cats as well as other small animals such as guinea pigs, rabbits and lambs.

Shelters will often state specifically if a dog has been 'cat-tested', but you should always ask to make sure if and how they have been exposed to cats or other animals, including livestock and wildlife. When considering shelters or rescue groups that rehome dogs from other countries, it's also important to consider the unique challenges and consequences that may arise. These dogs have been raised in a completely different environment, with different socialisation experiences, and may find it difficult to adjust (See [Environment](#), and [Socialisation](#)).

Considerations when rehoming

A dog used to living on the streets may actually be perfectly happy in that environment, and not adjust well to living in a home – however loving and well-intentioned their new owners. Rehoming such dogs also comes with the risk of importing exotic diseases that may impact their physical health and quality of life, as well as be a danger to human health (see [Health](#)). On the other hand, a dog that will be well behaved in a home may exhibit undesirable behaviour when exposed to the commotion and stress of a shelter environment.

Before you take your new dog home from a shelter or adoption centre, you should always introduce them to any other dogs in your family to help determine their compatibility and think about whether their personalities will be a good fit. Some shelters may allow a trial period to make sure your new dog truly fits in with your family. Individuality and personality will play a big role in both dogs' compatibility and emotional wellbeing – just like we humans work better with certain teammates and clash with others. Let's take energy levels, for example. A highly active dog isn't going to be the best match for an arthritic senior dog that finds rough play painful. Be sure to think about every aspect of your dog's personality and individuality so you can find the best match!

For more information on the benefits and considerations when adopting or fostering a new pet, read this [blog](#)





Best to avoid: commercial breeding facilities and pet shops

High-volume commercial breeding facilities, often referred to as ‘puppy mills’ or ‘puppy farms’, produce tens of thousands of puppies for sale every year and conditions can vary widely. Thousands of puppies are also illegally imported and mis-sold via online ads to unsuspecting, well-meaning people looking for a puppy. As you’d suspect, these operations do not nurture a dog’s individuality and it can be difficult to assess their personality, health and individual behaviour under such conditions.

These puppies are more likely to be sold in pet shops or over the internet. Puppies raised in a pet shop environment often fail to receive a variety of positive socialisation experiences and interactions with other people and pets (See [Socialisation](#)), which may make it more likely for them to exhibit problem behaviours¹ and less likely for them to adjust confidently to a new home environment and express their individuality in a positive manner.

¹McMillan, FD, Serpell, JA, Duffy, DL, Masaoud, E, Dohoo, IR. Differences in behavioral characteristics between dogs obtained as puppies from pet stores and those obtained from noncommercial breeders. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2013 May 15;242(10):1359-63.

Potential health risks

Regardless of where your puppy comes from, it's important to be aware that in some cases they may not even receive access to routine preventative healthcare, such as vaccinations or deworming which can lead to serious health problems. Poor health and welfare conditions may also lead to high levels of stress that can even impact brain development in young animals – manifesting later in life as abnormal social and fear-related behaviour, as well as an inability to develop or express their true personality.

This is why vigilance in visiting, inspecting and investigating the environment your new dog comes from, their parents, and their history is so important.



For more information about how to avoid puppy smuggling and help prevent the illegal importation of puppies, in particular, visit <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/latest/issues-campaigns/puppy-smuggling/>





Top tips for picking the right dog:

Only buy or rehome a dog or puppy from a transparent seller. The seller should also prioritise matching dogs and responsible families with well-suited lifestyles.

Ask lots of questions. The Dogs Trust has compiled some useful tips, including a puppy buyer advice checklist on how to select a puppy and the questions to ask the seller or current owner: [Buying a puppy checklist](#) & [What to do when you want to buy a puppy](#)

Always meet the dog's mum/parents and relatives if possible. Having healthy and behaviourally sound parents is important for a dog's personality – for all breeds of dog.

Watch your dog interacting with its current environment, other animals and people. This will help you get a feel for their individual personality and characteristics. Remember to consider your other dogs or pets and what characteristics your new dog might have, for them to fit in well.

Spend time with your future dog at home before committing where possible. Fostering, sharing custody or having a trial period can both be great options to enable you to get to know your dog's individual characteristics and needs before making a permanent commitment. A dog's behaviour also tends to be different in a shelter environment compared to in the home, so remember not to place too much importance on temperament or personality tests.

Learn more about individuality and emotional wellbeing for your pets at [shine.waltham.com](https://www.shine.waltham.com)