

WHAT TO CHECK BEFORE BUYING A DOG, ESPECIALLY ONLINE?



What to check before buying a puppy/dog?

Well-kept and healthy dogs are generally amazing companion animals and give a lot of joy! However, before buying them, think twice. Typically, dogs live for around 12 years, but some live much longer. So, if everything goes well and you buy a healthy and well-socialized dog, you have a nice companion for many years.

Is a dog right for me?

Things to consider:

- Will you be able to take daily care of it? Dogs will take up a lot of time and energy because they are dependent on your care. All dogs, even small ones, need regular exercise and plenty of opportunities to walk, run and play outside. The amount of exercise each dog needs is largely dependent upon their age and health but you should be prepared to take them for regular walks every day, as often as three times a day for some dogs.
- Will a dog fit into your family life?
- Who will care after the dog when you/the family go/goes on holiday?
- Do you have sufficient home space to keep a dog?
- Are you prepared for the costs? It is estimated that the average costs of keeping a dog is around 1000€ or more each year (food, materials, health and care costs, etc).

What kind of dog will be most suitable for me?

The next step is to consider what kind of dog will fit best with your lifestyle. Every dog has different qualities in terms of behaviour, need for exercise, amount of investment in time and need for veterinary care.

It is a good idea to consult a veterinarian and with their help conduct extensive reliable research online (see references below) before you get a dog. Veterinarians are able to give you advice on how to choose a dog that fits with your family's expectations and lifestyle. They can give you more information on the health and welfare needs of certain breeds. They may be able to recommend one or more of the breeders in the neighbourhood.



For further information, several organizations give advice that might be useful for choosing the right dog for you (see references for this).

Where to get a dog?

Consider carefully where to get a dog from. Ideally, get a dog from a registered shelter, local rehoming organisation or a reputable (registered¹) breeder. Many local rehoming centres or shelters have puppies as well as suitable adult dogs available for rehoming. Consider giving these animals a chance. The shelter will be able to check the suitability of the dogs to be rehomed with your family situation (e.g. children, other dogs, etc.). If you consider buying instead of adopting your dog, do your research into the breeder or seller² and seek recommendations.

When looking for a new puppy or dog, you are more likely to come across a deceitful breeder or seller than you think. Be careful not to get a puppy from a puppy farm³ or unscrupulous breeders or sellers, as this can cost you a lot of money and suffering for the dogs and puppies involved. Such puppy sellers may use emotional tricks to manipulate you to buy a puppy out of pity – be wary, and instead report suspected sellers to the police or local authorities.

There is an increasing trend for buying puppies or adult dogs online, at times from other countries, so please be aware of the increased risks of doing this (including health and welfare risks for the puppy or dog) because you may face expensive quarantine/fine/prosecution if the dog is imported illegally.

In some countries, specialized or classified journals and ad sites exist where breeders/sellers can sell dogs in a controlled way or a group of dogs looking for a home from a shelter, rescue or rehoming centres. Make sure to check the regulations for your country. However, keep in mind that these platforms are not perfect, so always be cautious! Check if the information that classified site demands from breeders/sellers is adequate to facilitate traceability, transparency, and accountability of breeders/sellers and to help reduce illegal and irresponsible selling of pets. For more information check references below.

Also be careful when using social media, since in some countries advertising for animals is prohibited on certain platforms. Some social media channels (e.g. Facebook) prohibit the sale or giving away live animals.

Wherever a puppy or a dog is advertised always follow the steps below to ensure that the breeder is responsible and that the puppy or a dog is happy and healthy.

¹ In some countries the registration and/or categorisation (hobby breeders, professional breeders, etc.) of breeders is mandatory by Law. Check out your national requirements.

² Please note that in this text "seller" is used for people who are buying and re-selling puppies or dogs by themselves.

³ A puppy farm (also known as a puppy factory or puppy mill) is defined as 'an intensive dog breeding facility that is operated under inadequate conditions that fail to meet the dogs' behavioural, social and/or physiological needs'. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-a-puppy-farm/>

What to check for before buying a puppy/dog online?



Animal-related factors to check:

- Always go to the breeder's establishment and meet the mother and the puppies before committing to buy. Never buy a puppy from an advertisement where you meet the breeder to collect the puppy from somewhere other than where the puppy was born (for example a motorway service station or carpark) or where the seller suggests to deliver the puppy to your house.
- Check that the puppy is happy and healthy when visiting the puppy (and mother). Some things that you should pay attention to include: eyes should be clear and bright, breathing should be quiet and effortless, the mouth should be clean with white teeth and pink gums, ribs not visible, the puppy should be alert to its surroundings, responding to stimulation etc.
- Check the details: when was the puppy born? Where was the puppy born? Where is the mother?
- The age: Puppies should never be sold before they are fully weaned, which is usually until 8 weeks of age. Your pet must be at least 12 weeks old before you can get it vaccinated against rabies for the purpose of pet travel because most countries do not accept animals older than 12 weeks without rabies vaccinations. You must inquire about the regulations of the country you plan to travel to. You can travel with the animal not less than 21 days after at least one dose of the rabies vaccination.
- Pictures: Do not be carried away by cute pictures (especially not the ones in an artificial surrounding), check if the picture is realistic and of the dog advertised. Look if the pictures are labelled correctly, e.g. a picture of one breed but its caption names it another breed.
- Ask for vaccination and other health records. Normally most puppies get their first vaccination by eight weeks of age. Puppies can't be vaccinated until they are over four weeks old. Even then, normally you shouldn't vaccinate a dog earlier than six weeks. Vaccination records should be stamped by the veterinary practice and signed by a veterinary surgeon. Ask if anti-parasitic treatment (deworming, treatment against fleas, etc) has been done? Ask if there were any health problems previously, etc.
- Ask for documentation regarding identification and registration. Ask if the dog has a European passport and if so, which number and which country code if applicable. The breeder should supply you with microchip paperwork which includes your puppy's individual identification number and database they are registered with. Bear in mind that if the dog comes from another country, he must have a passport from the country of origin, generally be properly vaccinated against rabies and be at least 15 weeks old (for EU countries - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R0576>). For third countries, there are special rules about import which can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/pet-movement/eu-legislation/non-eu-imports_en and <https://www.fve.org/publications/qa-rules-for-pet-travel-and-pet-passports/>



Breeder related factors to check:

Make sure you buy a dog from a responsible and registered (if applicable in your region) breeder.

- Red flags: when checking the breeders or sellers' websites, be on your watch for suspicious-looking text, text who looks like it has been online translated, wrong picture (picture does not correlate with dog described), few details about the breeder, price discounts, etc. Be careful of adverts in which the seller appears only by a pseudonym and a cell phone number. No deal is too good to be true.
- Try to find out if the website is from a commercial breeder, a hobby breeder or dog sellers. Most responsible breeders only breed from a few breeds and do not advertise dogs from more than three breeds. In some countries, it is illegal for anybody other than the breeder to sell puppies. Also, in some countries, breeders are required to have a licence to sell puppies commercially and should display their licence number or provide it.
- Speak to the breeder on the phone. Responsible breeders will have extensive knowledge of their particular breed. They will be happy to discuss how the puppies are kept and any health checks that have been conducted (on the puppy and its parents). The breeder will also ask you questions about your experience and suitability for owning a dog.
- Ask the breeder for references, testimonials or other credentials. Check with a local veterinarian.
- Ask about your rights as a buyer such as a consumer contract and/or warranty.
- Always go to the breeder's establishment and meet the mother and the puppies before committing to buy. Do not transfer any money before having seen the puppy in person. Make sure you get a receipt and the payment is traceable (use of a credit rather than a debit card). Don't trust those who ask you to pay cash or don't want to give you a receipt.



Your country might have additional requirements e.g. all dogs have to be identified and registered before being sold. Check out your national requirements.



Want to find out more, check here:

- [EU dog and cat alliance: publication on online dog sales](#)
(Excellent online resource with free tool kit developed to encourage those buying and breeding puppies to do so responsibly. Both for breeders as buyers. Includes a Puppy Contract.)
- [Campaign of Scottish Government on responsible buying of dogs](#)
- <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/puppy/choosing> (Information about choosing the right dog for you)
- <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/puppy/healthy> (Information about choosing a healthy puppy)
- <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/puppy> (More general information about buying a puppy)
- <https://www.wikihow.com/Buy-a-Puppy-Online-Safely> (Illustrative Wikihow with steps to ensure you can buy a puppy safe online)
- <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/buyer-advice/how-to-get-a-dog-responsibly> (Advice on getting a dog responsibly)
- <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/4371/paw-2018-full-web-ready.pdf> (Information about the estimated cost of keeping a dog)
- <https://puppycontract.org.uk/> (A free tool kit developed to encourage those buying and breeding puppies to do so responsibly)
- <https://www.stop-puppy-mills.org/> (Information about “Puppy mills – no thank you!” Initiative)
- <https://www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/topics/companion-animals/model-solution-traceability> (THE FOUR PAWS MODEL SOLUTION For full traceability across the EU online puppy trade)
- <https://dogappy.com/tips-to-keep-in-mind-while-buying-puppy-online> (Advice about buying a puppy online)
- <https://paag.org.uk/faqs/> (FAQs for The Pet Advertising Advisory Group)
- <https://paag.org.uk/selling-a-pet/> (Guidelines for online pet adverts by PAAG)
- <https://ipaag.ie/about-ipaag/minimum-standards/> (Minimum standards for websites)

More information in other languages:

- <https://www.wur.nl/nl/Onderzoek-Resultaten/Onderzoeksprojecten-LNV/Expertisegebieden/Actuele-themas/Kennis-op-maat/Fairfok-zo-kies-je-een-gezonde-en-sociale-hond.htm> (Advice on how to choose a healthy and well-socialised dog – in Dutch and French)
- <https://www.pup4life.be/> (Limburg veterinarians’ advice on choosing the right puppy for you – in Dutch)
- <http://eresresponsable.es/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Guía-Tenencia-Responsable.pdf> (Guidelines about responsible ownership – in Spanish)
- <https://jadopte.be/> (BE platform for shelter animals rehoming)
- <http://www.huisdierinfo.be/gespecialiseerde-media> (The list of specialized magazines and websites in Belgium - in Dutch)
- <http://bienetreanimal.wallonie.be/files/documents/sites-internet-specialises-reconnus.pdf> (The list of specialized sites in Belgium, Walloon region – in French)
- <http://bienetreanimal.wallonie.be/home/animaux/animaux-de-compagnie/publicite.html> (Information on pet advertisement, Walloon region – in French)



- <https://leefmilieu.brussels/themas/dierenwelzijn/de-handel-gezelschapsdieren/voorwaarden-voor-verhandeling/algemene-voorwaarden> (Conditions for selling animals in Belgium, Brussels-Capital region – In Dutch and French)
- <https://leefmilieu.brussels/themas/dierenwelzijn/de-handel-gezelschapsdieren/voorwaarden-voor-verhandeling/publiciteit> (Information on pet advertisement in Belgium, Brussels-Capital region – in Dutch and French)