

Buying a new puppy can be an exciting and happy experience. But too often it turns into an unpleasant and expensive experience. Many people buy puppies that quickly become ill or die. Others find that their puppy's breed or pedigree is not what the seller promised.

Currently, puppy purchases in Wisconsin are not covered by a "lemon law" like the law protecting automobile buyers. Therefore, it is particularly important that consumers educate themselves before making their purchase. If you are considering a new puppy, think about these points:

Does your lifestyle allow adequate time for a puppy?

Many households have no one home for long periods of time during the day to housebreak, train and socialize a puppy. Many behavior problems and housebreaking difficulties result from inadequate time spent with the pup.

Are you sure your housing situation allows you to keep a dog?

Many rental properties do not allow pets. If it is likely you will need to move, will your dog be permitted in the new location? Many pets are given up for just this reason.

Which breed of dog will best suit your needs?

Breeds with long, thick coats require more grooming. Large dogs need more room for housing and are more expensive to feed. Some breeds are very energetic and require more time and attention for exercise.

Do you know what to expect as normal behavior, and how to care for and manage the pet?

Do you have reasonable expectations of the puppy? It is important to remember that normal puppies are extremely active. Chewing and barking are normal, and puppies will have many "accidents" before they are housebroken. It is usually necessary to make some changes in your lifestyle to cope with the puppy's normal behavior.

Can you afford a dog?

All well-cared-for dogs require some expense. They need routine vaccinations and physical examinations to stay healthy. Spaying and neutering are beneficial procedures that you need to consider. Even healthy dogs may become ill or injured, and require costly veterinary care. Some breeds need professional grooming, and acceptable-quality dog food may be more expensive than you think.

Have you given enough thought to this decision?

Do not buy a dog on impulse; make an informed decision. Take advantage of the many resources available. Talk to veterinarians and breeders. Read books from the library or bookstore. Talk to owners of dogs similar to the breed you are considering.

Do you know where the puppy comes from?

Take a good look at the environment the puppies have been kept in. Is it clean? Are the animals healthy and in good condition? If possible, see the puppy's parents, or at least the mother, to get an idea of what the puppy will be like as an adult. If you are adopting the puppy from a shelter, the staff may be able to provide helpful information.

Is the breeder reputable?

It is not a good idea to get a puppy from someone who insists on bringing it to you in a parking lot or anywhere else. Reputable, conscientious breeders welcome questions and visits from prospective owners.

● **What sort of guarantee, if any, comes with the puppy?**

Make sure that you have a written guarantee, not just promises. Be sure you understand what recourse you have if the puppy should become ill or if other problems arise. If the seller makes claims about what will or will not be covered, be sure to get specifics in writing. Do not make assumptions based on what you think should be covered. Have your puppy examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

● **Are you buying a dog that you expect to register with the American Kennel Club (AKC)?**

If you are purchasing a pedigreed dog, you should receive the necessary registration papers when you take the puppy. Many problems arise from sellers not providing registration papers to the buyer at the time of purchase. Keep in mind that AKC registration will not guarantee a dog's quality, conformation, temperament or health.

Buying a dog is a real commitment. If you make a well-informed decision with your eyes wide open, you will be rewarded with a happy, healthy dog and years of faithful companionship.

For more information about buying a puppy:

On the web . . .

<http://www.akc.org/puppybuyerinfo/>

<http://www.purina.com/choosing-a-pet/>

A good book . . .

The Right Dog for You, by Daniel F. Tortora, Ph.D.

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Puppy shopping



Do you have the whole picture?

