

## **BowWOW!**

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

### **Off To A Good Start**

Knowing I am All-About-Dogs people will frequently engage me in conversations that begin with “We just got a puppy this weekend!” I wade cautiously into these exchanges curious to know if the new owner was overcome with spontaneous puppy desire or had they actually planned for what could become a sixteen-year commitment. Unfortunately, many of these new dog ventures fail because at the very beginning people do not take enough time to evaluate the desired dog or their own abilities to deal with it once it becomes a part of the household.

Practically speaking, if you’re considering adding a puppy to the family ask the question “How much time do I have?” If you bring a baby dog home on a whim you will spend weeks, months or even years playing catch-up struggling to recover from mistakes made in the first few weeks. It may even grow into the problem of “how-do-we-get-rid-of” if the concerns become chronic.

First, when you get the itch for a puppy, resist. Begin your search by visualizing the whole package of dogness: the ideal age, size, coat, breed or breed cross, energy level, attention span, ability to give and receive attention, sociability, portability and health status. With that vision in mind, visit shelters frequently *without bringing a dog home*. It will be tough to walk past all those pleading eyes, but keep the vision of your perfect dog in mind each time you visit. Be flexible to a degree but stick with it because little deviations from your ideal can become huge problems in the long run.

For instance, you like to keep your house tidy and your vision of the perfect dog is a medium-sized, clean, shorthaired dog. However, you fall in love with a shaggy black puppy that grows into a 70-pound kind-of-a-shepherd that spends most of its free time off-loading long hair onto all your nice carpets. In time, the relationship with the dog will suffer because your desire for a hair-free living room may confine the dog to the kitchen or, worse, the backyard. Don’t settle for a dog that doesn’t gladden your heart in every way and you won’t find yourself returning an older, less adoptable dog to the shelter when it doesn’t work out.

While you are visiting shelters, prepare your house and your personal lifestyle for your little addition. Purchase all the things you’ll need to make the transition easier *before* you bring the puppy home: get a crate, good puppy food, a leash, grooming equipment, toys, Nature’s Miracle, paper towels. Think about containment. Do you need a portable pen? Do you need to make a major household improvement by fencing the backyard? Think long and hard about your commitment to time spent with the dog. Are you committed to taking walks several times a day no matter what the weather or your social obligations? Are

you committed to constantly supervising your pup for the first weeks? Are you committed to paring down your environment to absolute basics to protect your puppy from the temptation of contraband?

Recently I had the pleasure of home boarding a pair of 12-week-old puppies, Miss S, a Springer spaniel and Master S, a West Highland terrier. Before their visit I rolled up the carpets, closed off all but their assigned area, tied up any exposed cords, put plants out of danger-range, and had the paper towels and cleaner readily at hand. Yet, I still had to run down Master S when he sped past with a white glove in his mouth. White glove? (I have white gloves?) Obviously, I missed the one thing I didn't even know I had, but Master W did not.

These considerations are only the beginning of accepting responsibility for the life of another living creature. The way you prepare and care for your pup in the first few weeks will determine your success of a life-long relationship of companionship and love.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and **wholeDog**.  
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