

National Dog Day: 5 things you should know before buying your next best friend

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MADISON – Friday is National Dog Day and oodles of organizations are sponsoring free puppy adoptions to give dogs their forever homes. While buying a new dog can be an exciting and happy experience, there are some important things to remember when buying or adopting a dog, according to Dr. Yvonne Bellay, the humane programs veterinarian at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

“There is no doubt that puppies are adorable, but it’s important to remember that they won’t stay little for long. Eventually they will grow out of their puppy stage and will be with you for the rest of its life,” Bellay says.

For your own protection and for that of your new dog, do your research and know what to look for when shopping for a puppy or dog.

“We have many resources available on our website to help with the responsible purchase of a new puppy including questions you should ask and tips for internet shopping,” Bellay says.

Aside from research, there are some things you can do to make your purchase experience a good one, Bellay says.

- **Evaluate whether your lifestyle and housing situation are appropriate for owning a dog.** Sometimes landlords do not allow pets, so you should check with your landlord. Also determine if you will have time to spend with the dog to housebreak, train and socialize it.
- **Determine if you can 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.
- **Ask about the dog’s veterinary care including which vaccinations and review previous health test results.** Licensed breeders and sellers must keep good records as proof that vaccinations were given and indicate who administered the vaccinations. Many reputable breeders will have their dogs evaluated and tested for common genetic conditions and ultimately "certified" by a veterinary specialist or organization. Research your chosen breed before you buy to determine if the breed is predisposed to a particular condition. In the case of adopting, ask the shelter if the dog has undergone tests to detect heartworms or other parasites. Have your new dog or puppy examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

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- **Make sure that you have a written health 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.
- **If buying from a breeder, ask if you can see one or both of the parents and where they and the puppies are kept.** Check to see that the facilities the puppies are kept in are clean, well-ventilated and allow adequate room for the puppies to play and socialize. If the breeder will not let you see the condition of the parents or the environment in which the puppies are raised, find a different breeder.

In 2011, DATCP implemented a law that requires some dog breeders and others involved in dog sales, adoptions and sheltering to be inspected and licensed to ensure the safety and well-being of the dogs and ensure that purchasers are protected as well. The law requires the department to inspect and license every dog seller and dog facility in the State of Wisconsin that sells at least 25 dogs a year from more than 3 litters. It also requires that the dogs be examined by a veterinarian before they are sold or adopted and prohibits the sale of puppies until they are at least 7 weeks old.

Visit www.datcp.wi.gov for questions to ask before you buy a puppy, a list of licensed dog sellers in Wisconsin, and background information on the Wisconsin law. If you've run across a breeder that has caused you concern, you are urged to report them to DATCP at 608.224.4872.

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