

# Searching for the Dog of Your Dreams?

By Jennifer Strickland



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**S**o you want a dog? It sounds easy enough. There are so many different options available and you may already be partial to a specific breed or look. How hard can it really be for people to get the dog of their dreams? You'd be surprised. Unfortunately, the research step is often bypassed and spur of the moment decisions can be based only on the appearance of the dog. Those split second decisions can many times lead to a less than ideal situation for the dog. There can, however, be a win-win outcome for both the new owner and pooch—as long as the person or family is realistic about what will work in their specific lifestyle and they do the proper research.

For those of us in the animal welfare field, we of course want to see pets stay in permanent loving homes. Unfortunately, we witness a frequent scenario that doesn't always end well for the dog. At Foothills Animal Shelter, we take in nearly 10,000 orphaned and homeless pets of all shapes and sizes every year. The Humane Society of the United States estimates six to eight million dogs and cats are taken to shelters annually in this country, of which 25 percent are purebred.

So often we see a dog brought to us because the animal simply doesn't fit into a home. It is like trying to shove a square block into a circular hole. It just doesn't fit. The owner is sobbing and sincerely heartbroken with the choice to give up their canine friend.

The second scenario we sometimes see is a family which has seen a dog on our website. They come in and want more background information. Their search has been extensive and they have been looking for dogs on five different shelter websites. They have talked to others who have owned this type of dog and feel like it could be a good match. They have also brought their current Fido with them to make sure the two dogs can get along. While they are excited about the thought of bringing a new dog into their home, they are realistic about their family's needs and are not pressured by a timeline. These two factors are crucial in successfully picking a new canine companion who will stay in the home for its entire life. This family will be triumphant in finding a "dog of their dreams."

If you are prone to liking the second scenario's end result, consider some suggestions that can assist you in finding that perfect pooch. First, ask yourself why you want a dog. Do you want companionship? Does this mean you want Rover to be a couch potato? Do you want a running partner that can go three miles with you every other day on the trails? If you really just want a dog to lay on the sofa with you, then picking a dog that never sits still is obviously not going to be a good choice. On the other hand, if you are energetic and always on the go and want a dog to be with you a great deal of the time, you are not going to want a dog that would prefer to be at home.

Also, think about your availability. Do you work 12-hour shifts or do you have typical 8 to 5 days? Do you work from home or are you retired? No matter the answer, looking at this piece of the puzzle is important. If you truly want a puppy, think through the housebreaking process. If you work long days, are you available to come home for lunch or can you hire a pet sitter to let Fluffy out during the middle of the day? Is it feasible to install a doggie door that goes to a secure fenced-in yard? Can you get them out consistently enough for proper socialization? Will you be able to puppy-proof your home? Do you have time to take Rover to training class so he can learn manners and basic commands? Perhaps an older, more settled dog would be a better choice, but maybe you feel a puppy would do best with your child. This question leads into the very big topic of kids.

Ask yourself how much you would like your child to be part of your dog's care. Having them help with the responsibility is one thing, but expectations have to be realistic. The other factor is picking a dog that works well with a child. If you go with an exuberant dog, will you take him back because he knocked over little Johnny with their wagging tail? Will you supervise your child with a dog? Some breeds are definitely better with kids and will tolerate and enjoy children more than others. Many times this information is listed when doing your research on a particular breed or on a specific dog that may be at a shelter. If you are looking at a mixed breed, simply ask as much information as you can about the history of the dog. For instance, at Foothills Animal Shelter, we do behavior assessments to determine if a dog would do well in a home with a child. The other key piece, of course, is determining if the parents will monitor the pair and teach the child appropriate behavior around a dog.

While it may seem minor, you should also consider grooming needs. If you know you will not bathe and brush Sparky's long hair each week, nor will you be consistent with taking him to a grooming salon, then perhaps a "wash and wear" dog would be most suitable. Although, maybe you prefer the looks of more hair on your pooch and wouldn't mind making regular trips to the groomer along with the added expense.

Financially speaking, are you in a position to pay for the food, training, visits to the veterinarian, boarding and all of the other aspects of dog ownership that cost money? It is important to be honest with yourself and to even look at your budget.

Finally, is the timing right? Are you super stressed at work and have endless evening meetings until that other position in your department is filled? Do you have a month-long vacation coming up in three weeks? Maybe waiting is best. It's really about common sense.

After going through this list of questions, if you feel you and everybody else in your household is ready for a dog, then move on to the search. If you are unsure of what kind of dog would do best in your home, think about going to the library and reading about different breeds of dogs. Talk to other dog owners, your veterinarian and dog trainers. Definitely take advantage of animal shelters and their knowledgeable staff and wealth of information. Our shelter has a friendly customer care team who can customize an adoption for you. We can also talk to you about different kinds of dogs, your needs and help in the match-making process.

Adoption can be a wonderful option since many great dogs are waiting to find a loving home. In turn, you will be helping homeless canines who sometimes end up in a shelter simply because somebody didn't take the time to research and be honest with themselves. Be part of the successful scenario, and remember dogs are a lifelong commitment. While the search process can sometimes be challenging, it can be very rewarding when you find just the right "dream dog."

*Foothills Animal Shelter is located at 580 MacIntyre Street in Golden. For more information on adopting, donating and volunteering or to see the huge variety of available pets, please call 303-278-7575 or visit their website [www.foothillsanimalshelter.org](http://www.foothillsanimalshelter.org).*

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