

Paws For Pets

Parkview Animal Hospital

Finding the Perfect Dog

There is no such animal. So, stop looking. ...

Americans love animals and know little about them. We are used to convenience and short cuts; we respond to marketing. Meanwhile, the pet industry needs to move a lot of animals, so it promotes the idea that there's a Perfect Dog for everyone.

The Perfect Dog is an enticing fantasy pooch. It's the dog that instantly learns to pee outdoors, never menaces or frightens children, plays gently with other dogs, won't jump on the UPS guy, never rolls in gross things, eats only the appropriate food at the right time, and never chews anything not meant for him. This dog does not exist.

The peddling of Perfect Dogs amounts to a multibillion dollar business in the United States. You'll never see images of ugly dogs vomiting in the living room or terrorizing the letter carrier on dog food commercials. Those dogs—the ones we want—are always adorable. Their happy owners are not holding pooper scoopers.

The most important time for you and your dog is the stretch you spend considering whether, where, and how to get a dog and what sort of dog to get. Unfortunately, that process lasts only a few minutes for most people. Thus, much trouble for both species.

Most Americans acquire dogs im-

pulsively and for dubious reasons: as a Christmas gift for the kids. Because they saw one in a movie. To match the new living-room furniture. Because they moved to the suburbs and see a dog as part of the package. Because they couldn't resist that wide-eyed puppy in the mall pet store or the poster published by the local shelter.

Even the scant time it will take to read and mull over the following questions (and some answers) might improve your chances of finding the right dog.

1. *Why do I want a dog?*
Researchers studying human-animal attachments find we have complex personal motives for wanting a dog (or cat) and for choosing a particular one at a given time. It's important to understand some of those impulses, even if it means picking at psychic scabs. Are you lonely? Sick of people? Unhappy at work? Re-enacting some familial drama? Drawn to the aesthetics of a beautiful pure-bred? Compelled by the idea of rescuing, but not necessarily training, a dog? Understanding your own motivation doesn't mean getting a dog is wrong, but it may help you make a better choice of animal—or decide that what you really need doesn't come on four legs.
2. *How can I get a well-behaved*

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Illustration by
Robert Neubecker

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- dog? You can't. Dogs don't come that way. It's natural canine behavior to chew on all sorts of things, roll in other animals' droppings, hump and fight other dogs, menace anything that invades the home. All these behaviors can be curbed, but that takes a lot of work. Trainers say it requires nearly 2,000 repetitions of a behavior for a dog to completely absorb it.
3. *Does it matter what kind of dog I get?* It is both foolish and irresponsible to know nothing about the characteristics of the animal that you, your family, and your neighbors will have to live with for years. Last year, more than 400,000 kids were bitten badly enough by dogs to require a hospital visit. Don't add to the number.
 4. *Is it wrong to buy a purebred when so many dogs face confinement and death in shelters?* It's about as wrong as having a baby when millions of poor children suffer. Getting the right dog involves not only moral but practical considerations. Acquiring a rescue or shelter dog can be incredibly rewarding, but when you adopt one, you may also acquire behavioral issues caused by previous mistreatment. You may need to be prepared for even more arduous training than usual. Raising a dog acquired from a good and reputable breeder, who understands the dog's temperament and the human's circumstances and can match the two, is much easier. Working with a Lab, standard poodle, golden retriever, or German shepherd—breeds that have worked with humans for centuries and whose behavioral traits are well known—may mean fewer surprises.
 5. *How should I get a dog?*

There's no one way. Avoid the puppy mills—unscrupulous breeders mass-breed and in-breed dogs and sell them to pet stores. Go to a shelter, rescue group, or experienced breeder (get some references). Whoever provides the dog should be skeptical. A good breeder or experienced rescue agency wants you to prove that you'll be a capable caretaker. The interrogation and screening can be annoying, but it's also a sign that you're on the right track. A breeder *ought* to know if you work long hours away from home, have a fenced yard, have kids or other animals, or if you have access to parks. Why are there all those mastiffs, Rottweilers, and border collies in Manhattan? It's what happens when unscrupulous breeders meet thoughtless customers.

6. *Is it a mistake to buy a dog for your child?* Only if you are unrealistic enough to believe your kid's promises that of course she'll take care of the new puppy. Kids have short attention spans. They'll coo over the puppy, but in a few months it will be a dog. And who will be walking it at 6 a. m. on a winter morning? Don't surprise your kids with a puppy—they really might prefer a new computer.

Some romantics see the match between a human and dog as kismet; If they're "right" for one another, or destined to be together, they'll fall in love at first sight. But most puppies are cute. And few humans like to accept the idea that the affectionate puppy is as drawn by the food he smells on your hands as by some mysterious ethereal connection. Be cautious. Go slow. Think about it.

Meow More Than Ever

A stray tabby gives birth to a litter of three kittens under the lilac bush in a backyard. As she nurses them, she purrs; and as they suckle, they purr as well. The queen shifts her weight trying to find a more comfortable nursing position and one of the kittens lets out a distress call indicating he's trapped under his mother's weight. She readjusts herself and the purring of all parties continues. One morning she decides to move her litter to a safer spot. She deposits the first one inside the garden shed and goes to retrieve the next one. Detecting

the absence of his mother via his sense of smell, the kitten lets out a loud distress call distinctly meant to reunite mothers and wayward kittens. As the kittens mature, the queen spends more time away from the nest in order to hunt for prey to ensure enough milk for her growing crew. Each time she returns, she gives out a "brrp" to her kittens.



Meow, *from page 2*

As the kittens begin the weaning stage, the queen brings prey home to them, calling them over to it with a chirp. The kittens also begin to make chirping noises in anticipation for what they are to receive. However, tonight's dinner is interrupted when Mom lets out a long, low-pitched growl meant to scatter the kittens and get them to safe-keeping inside the shed before the owl overhead can snatch one for his own evening meal.

“The purr is the most common sound issued by cats and yet one of the least understood.”

As independent hunters, cats have limited need for an extensive vocal repertory. Cat-to-cat vocalizations are generally limited to communicating with one's kittens, one's sexual partners and one's potential enemies. There is also an array of vocalizations used when attempting to communicate with humans.

The purr is the most common sound issued by cats and yet one of the least understood. One of the first vocalizations uttered (along with grunts), kittens a few hours old purr as they knead the queen's chest and nurse. The sound is made while the cat is both inhaling and exhaling with an instantaneous break between breaths. Built-up pressure created by the opening and closing of the glottis results in a sudden separation of the vocal folds, creating the purr. While often heard when the cat seems particularly content, those familiar with handling cats in pain or near death know they also purr when under duress, the reason for which is yet unknown.

The second most common vocalization is the meow. Rarely heard between cats, this vocalization seems tailor-made for communication between our species. Early on, cats notice that meowing brings attention, contact, food and play from their human companions. Some behaviorists suggest that certain cats seem to alter their meows to suit different purposes and that some guardians can differentiate between, say, the “I'm hungry meow” from the “let me out” meow. Others would say this is more context-driven than actually being able to infer meaning by sound alone.

The meow is the most used of the vowel patterns - vocalizations produced with the mouth first open and

then gradually closing. Several forms of demand also fit into this category. The sound cats make when highly aroused by the sight of prey is called chirping. When a cat is frustrated, like when an indoor cat finds he is unable to get to the birds at the feeder, you may hear him chatter. And when a neonate kitten is cold, isolated from his mother or trapped, he issues a distress call (also called an anger wail in some literature). As the kitten matures, the distress call is used when play is too rough or the cat finds something else to protest.

All threat vocalizations are produced with the mouth held open. These sounds mirror the cat's intense emotional state. A hiss is uttered when a cat is surprised by an enemy. A high-pitched shriek or scream is expressed when the cat is in pain or fearful and aggressive. Snarling is often heard when two toms are in the midst of a fight over territory or female attention. And a long, low-pitched growl warns of danger.

By changing volume, intensity and number of repetitions of the vocalizations and backing them up with expressive body language and olfactory signaling, cats ensure their messages are received and that their needs are met.

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Ferrets: Veterinary Care

Welcome to the world of companion ferrets! As a responsible owner, you'll need to provide your pet with good food, good fun, lots of TLC and regular veterinary care. As soon as your fuzzball has settled in, we recommend a trip to the vet for a thorough examination.

Veterinarians specializing in ferrets aren't always easy to find. You can ask the members of your ferret club or local shelter for a referral, or call veterinary practices in your area to ask if the doctors have experience with the species. This is also a good time to purchase a carrier or travel cage to safely transport your pet.

When you bring your ferret for his exam, be prepared to provide information on where and when you purchased your pet, what you're feeding him and anything unusual you've noticed about him. The veterinarian will conduct a complete physical exam of your ferret, including a check of the heart, lugs, ears, eyes and teeth. Your pet's temperature and weight will be recorded. The veterinarian may ask you to bring a fecal sample with you, so he or she can determine if your ferret has internal parasites, such as worms and coccidia.

If your pet is older or ill, the veterinarian may recommend additional testing. The results of a general blood panel can point to problems with the liver, kidney and pancreas, for example, and radiographs of the chest and abdomen can be useful in diagnosing tumors or heart conditions-especially in ferrets over the age of three, who are considered geriatric. Older ferrets may also require more dental care, including an annual scaling to remove tartar buildup.

It is also imperative that you keep up-to-date on your ferret's shots. These little guys must be vaccinated against canine distemper, which is 100-percent fatal to ferrets, and rabies. Most ferrets get their distemper shots before they enter the pet trade, but if you

have purchased or adopted a ferret who has never been vaccinated-or one with an unknown medical history-he will need both initial and booster shots. After that, annual vaccinations for distemper are required. Rabies shots should be given after the age of 12 weeks, with a yearly booster. And if you live in an area of the country where mosquitoes are a problem, ASPCA experts strongly recommend that you give your ferret a monthly heartworm prevention medication. Talk to your veterinarian about the various types available.

Most ferrets sold as pets have already been spayed or neutered, but if yours is not, be sure to schedule a date for the surgery with your veterinarian. An intact female will stay in heat until she is bred, leading to a weakened immune system and a greater than average chance of developing life-threatening anemia. Unneutered male ferrets mark their territory, are very aggressive with other animals, and have a very strong--to say the least!--odor. It is recommended that all ferrets be altered by the time they are six months old.

If you notice any unusual symptoms in your pet, do not wait until your yearly check-up to consult your vet. Signs of illness include vomiting, diarrhea, hair loss, lack of appetite, heavy panting or other difficulty breathing. If you think your ferret is ill, it's important to contact the veterinarian immediately.

