

Play by the Numbers

8 Reasons to Get an Adult Dog Rather Than a Puppy

By Karen B. London, PhD

Our dreams about getting a new dog tend to involve an adorable puppy whose every memory will include us. Sadly, the reality of raising a puppy can be quite different from the fantasy. One compensation for living through the first few months with a puppy is getting to tell the stories about it. (We didn't sleep for three months. I started to dream about sleep-while I was awake." "You misunderstood me. She didn't chew the couch. I said she ate the couch." "I didn't notice she had urinated in my briefcase until I opened it at the meeting in front of a new client, who naturally never came back.") While there is no denying puppies have charms, an adult dog has plenty of advantages. Here are eight compelling reasons to adopt an adult dog rather than a puppy.

1. An Adult dog cannot grow up to be a different size than expected. One such memorable "surprise" dog came to one of my puppy classes. He was a mix, and I was asked to play the usual guessing game about what he might be. When I replied that the only breed that seemed an obvious part of his heritage was Great Dane, the woman with him almost fainted. She was hoping for a dog less than 50 pounds, which is what the shelter told her to expect. This individual topped out at 28 inches and nearly 100 pounds. Whoops.

2. There is an overabundance of adult dogs in needs of homes. Dog overpopulation remains a serious problem, and countless adult dogs wait too long for homes or, even worse, never get one. By adopting an adult dog, you are providing a loving home to an individual who might not otherwise find one.

3. An adult dog may already be housetrained. Teaching a dog that your home, and the Persian rug in particular, is not a bathroom might not be the hardest training task, but

It is definitely one of the more relentless. Even under the best circumstances, it involves constant vigilance, adjusting your schedule, sleep disruption, some frustration, and the occasional unpleasant clean-up. I adopted a two-and-a-half dog who never, ever had an accident in the house, and I really appreciated this feature.

4. Adult dogs have typically matured beyond the common puppy problems. It is predictable that puppies will go through stages of at least mild issues with chewing on objects or mouthing on people. In contrast, adult dogs have normally out grown these annoying habits, which is so much better for you. While the problems of the rocky puppy stage are only temporary, it is wonderful to adopt a dog who went through them before making your acquaintance.

5. Adult dogs require less exercise. While dogs of any age certainly need exercise, puppies can be especially demanding. At a minimum, the average puppy needs 45 minutes of off-leash exercise twice a day, plus lots of small sessions of activity or walks. Adult dogs typically do well with just one daily session of exercise. My husband and I once fostered a five-month-old English Springer Spaniel puppy who would run with us off leash on our 150-acre farm for two to three hours each day, and even this was not nearly enough to tire her out or satisfy her. If you want to test your marriage (ours survived), getting a particularly high-energy puppy should do the trick.

6. An adult dog may have had some training. Not everybody is this lucky, but sometimes an adult dog will already know things like sit, down, stay, shake, high-five, and heel. Of course, this is not a sure thing-plenty of people have adopted an adult dog who apparently had never heard the word "sit" before, much less mastered the skills

associated with it, or any other skills for that matter.

7. Lots of adult dogs are already spayed or neutered. Getting a dog who has already had this surgery is a big bonus. First, bad reactions to these surgeries, although rare, can occur, and the dog who has already had it no longer faces such a risk. Second, while the expense is well worth it, there are much more fun ways to spend our money on our dogs (toys, chews, treats, dog beds, for example). Third, although puppies recover quickly from these procedures, it's a challenge to keep an approximately six-month-old dog from being active for even a few days. (By the way, I am by no means trying to talk *anybody* out of spaying or neutering their dog, which I wholeheartedly endorse. I am merely pointing out that if this necessary task has already been taken care of, it only makes sense to be grateful.)

8. Adult adoptees are likely to appreciate your kindness and attention. Dogs who have previously been in less-than-perfect situations often seem grateful to have arrived at some version of doggy heaven. A lot of re-homed dogs are strongly attached, highly afflictive "Velcro" companions, which runs counter to the common wisdom that the only way to get such a strong bond is to adopt a puppy.

Whatever the age of the dog you welcome into your home and into your heart, recognize that this choice will have a huge – and, I hope, happy – impact on your life for years to come. The age of your new dog is far less important than how well matched you are to her. May love and luck, along with carefully researched and thoughtful choices, unite you and the one (or two or more!) canine companions with whom joy comes standard.

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