



The Family Dog

Tips for Adopting the Breed That Fits Your Fort Bend Family to a T

Written by Crystal Rawls & Photography by Suzi Issa

With their wagging tails and floppy tongues, dogs rejoice when you're happy, grieve when you're sad, and sympathize when you're sick. Just like humans, they have distinct personalities that can make or break a relationship. When paired with the right family, though, they will flourish and add much joy to your life. With so much to love about man's best friend, your family can find just the right fit.

Researching Different Breeds

Before the pet adoption process begins, it's best to do a little research. "Decide what qualities you want in a pet before you start looking," says Dr. V.C. Devaney, a Fort Bend relief veterinarian. "Do you want a quiet, calm pet to sit beside the fireplace or an energetic pet that will run with you? Do you want a short-haired dog, which sheds, or a long- or curly-haired dog, which requires frequent grooming? Do you want a large or small dog? Then find

a dog that matches these qualities, even if it's not the breed or gender you initially thought you might want."

Pet adoption centers and shelters will often already know the dog's personality and will be able to advise potential owners of the best dog for their lifestyle. "Breed is not nearly as important as personality," says Dr. Devaney.

A Family's Best Friend

For Amber Wright, her boxers' patient personalities are the perfect fit for her busy family of four. So perfect, in fact, that they own three: Zoey, Zeus, and Tripp. "They are very playful and great family dogs," says Wright. "They are even good with our baby Abby, she loves Zeus. They let her climb on them and don't get mad when she runs into them with her walker. I have nothing to worry about, which is great."

Dr. Devaney cautions parents to monitor their child's interaction with pets to avoid biting and scratching. "The best personality [of dog] for young children is a relaxed, non-anxious dog," he says. "An older, already house-trained dog, which has been around young children safely is a great option, and many rescue groups have dogs like this just waiting to be adopted."

An Australian shepherd named Elvis was the ideal playmate for Maria-Josefina and Eduardo Garcia's four children, ranging in ages from 11 to 2. "Elvis doesn't know that he is a dog," says Eduardo. "He believes that he is another kid at home. He plays with the kids, runs with me, and goes to the beach with the family." Eduardo adds, "He is very gentle with everyone, and the kids from the neighborhood usually ring the bell to ask if they can play with Elvis."

A Cherished Companion

Susan and Dave Stayshich relied on positive past experiences when they brought home Elwood, a golden Labrador retriever. In their 37 years of marriage, the couple has had eight dogs, the last four of which have been Labrador retrievers. "We have found that, for us, they are the ideal dog," says Dave. "The Labs we have had never met a stranger. They love being around people and are constantly wanting affection."

While Dave is at work, Elwood is a comfort for Susan. "He is Susan's constant companion at home and helps take her focus away from her chronic pain [as she] pays attention to him," says Dave.

Shirley and Carroll Scott dote on their two miniature dachshunds, Scout and Bella, enjoying the companionship the two dogs provide. "Since we are empty nesters, these are our children," says Shirley. "They have brought us more joy than we could have ever anticipated. In the past, we have laughed at people over their dogs. Now, we are the ones being laughed at. We fully believe that people should not have animals if they cannot afford to take the best possible care of them. They are 'little people,' too."

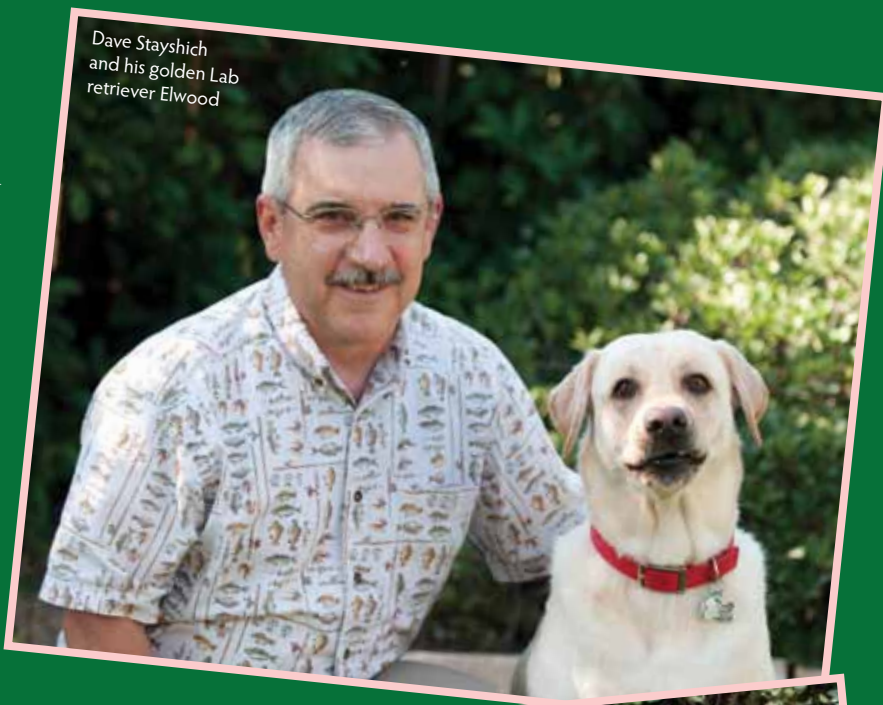
Avoiding Allergic Reactions

A few sniffles don't have to stand in the way of the perfect pet. While dogs do have a tendency to incite allergies, there are ways to avoid the discomfort. "There is no one dog-fits-all for allergies," says Dr. Devaney. "People may be allergic to multiple parts of the dog: the skin, the hair, etc. Without knowing which part of the dog causes your reaction, you can't choose a dog that's less reactive."

For some people, Dr. Devaney says dogs with long-hair coats, like poodles or bichons, cause them to react less. These breeds often require daily brushing or frequent grooming, though, so the person who is allergic may not be able to groom the dog alone.

Dr. Devaney recommends getting a foster dog in order to test out your allergy tolerance. "Choose a breed through a rescue group and foster the dog you want before you adopt it," she says. "If the dog and your allergy are compatible when you live with the dog, you can adopt the dog permanently. If not, the dog can find a different 'forever home.'"

Dave Stayshich and his golden Lab retriever Elwood



Jenna and David Wessels and their children Christian and Justin love the many quirks of their cockapoo Raider



Shirley and Carroll Scott with their miniature dachshunds Scout and Bella



Scout and Bella bring a lot of joy to the Scotts, who are empty nesters



Raider is very loving and gets along well with the Wessels' two young sons

Pinpointing Your Pet's Personality

When the Wessels family adopted their beloved cockapoo Raider, she didn't take to training as easily as they had hoped. Her personality is well-suited for the family's two rowdy boys, but her anxiety stands in the way of training her. The Wessels have grown to fully accept that, adapting their lifestyle to properly care for their dog.

Jenna Wessels explains, "In the words of my vet Dr. Ping, 'She's special. There are just some dogs, like 2% of them, that just can't be trained.' But through all the trouble we seem to have with house training and not being able to leave her alone for long periods of time, I wouldn't change it for the world. She is an extremely loving dog and fits in with our family well. Whereas someone else might have had a hard time looking over what David calls her quirks, we accept them with loving, open arms."

According to Dr. Devaney, retrieving, pointing, and herding breeds are easier to train than others. "These traits make them excel at complicated tasks like sheep herding, hunting, search and rescue, and [serving] as guide dogs," he says. "However, if you don't put their energy and drive to a specific purpose, like agility training, then the dog may spend all that energy doing things that are misdirected, like barking, digging, and getting into trouble."

Providing a Loving Forever Home

The City of Sugar Land's Animal Services division provides a pet adoption program for would-be pet owners. For more information about adopting the right dog, call 281-275-2842 or visit sugarlandtx.gov. **SLM**

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Kirby



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