

# Research breed to make better canine connection

Breeders, rescue organizations help potential pet owners make a good match

By Jennifer Justus • THE TENNESSEAN • February 13, 2010

Blame it on the glossy puppy calendars. Or maybe it's all those childhood memories of the family Cocker Spaniel. But when it comes to dogs, many people have a penchant for a certain breed.

When Vanderbilt students conducted a study for the [Nashville Humane Association](#), they found that for every 100 people who visited the nonprofit shelter, only 17 would adopt. And the biggest reason for leaving petless? People often come in the door with a specific idea of what they want. Should they feel guilty about wanting a Miniature Dachshund when so many short-legged mutts need a rescue? Maybe not. After all, the important thing, the rescue organizations and the [American Kennel Club \(AKC\)](#) say, is doing the research on the front-end and knowing the right breed to suit your lifestyle.

"You have that wonderful thing called predictability," said Lisa Peterson, spokesperson for the AKC. "By knowing yourself and your lifestyle, you can pick a pure breed that has some predictability to make that good match."

With breeders or rescue agencies, the better the match, the better the experience for both owner and pet, which leads to fewer returns, dumps or bad adoptions. It's okay to have your heart set on a certain breed, experts say, as long as you know the breed — and yourself. For instance, will the dog outgrow your home? Do allergies dictate a hypoallergenic breed? Do activity levels match owner with dog?

At the Nashville Humane Association, executive director Mary Pat Boatfield knows breeds well and can help steer families to dogs with similar traits (such as plays well with cats or younger children). And even if they can't make a match, Boatfield can offer alternatives with breed rescues.

"If you want a Cocker Spaniel or a Lab or a Weimaraner, there's a rescue organization that can accommodate you," she said.

Glenda Campbell of Nashville works with [Labs4Rescue](#), and agrees there are "rescues for everything."

But according to Peterson, Labs are the number one AKC registered dog in Tennessee, and there's more than enough to go around.

"There's 'free Lab to a good home' in the paper every day," Campbell said, adding that large black Labs also get euthanized more than any other breed in the South. So for families who've researched the breed, there's opportunity to make a match.

But again Campbell, who also works with a pet transport group that makes weekly drives to deliver dogs for adoption to Little Rock, Ark., or as far north as New Hampshire, reiterated that the high-energy Labrador isn't for everyone.

## Don't 'gift' a dog

All cuteness aside, Lab puppies — or any puppy — can be particularly problematic in making poor matches.

"I never adopt out anything that's given as a gift," Campbell said.

Potential owners can get wrapped up in the emotion of an adorable little animal, and that's not always good. For example, a Maltese puppy that seemed sweet and harmless at first might cause trouble in the long run.

Advertisement"When it's chewing up Mom's favorite pair of shoes? The dog's gone," she said.

Erin Roland of Nashville, who fosters two dogs, said she couldn't bring herself to buy a dog when there are so many that need homes.

"There's breed-specific rescues," she said. "It's unbelievable the purebred dogs that languish in shelters."

By **Valentine's Day**, shelters are hit with puppies or dogs that seemed like a good idea in December.

Campbell also noted that potential pet owners should be flexible when choosing dogs by age. She sees a lot of people, she said, who think they need a puppy for optimal dog-owner bonding.

"That couldn't be further from the truth," she said. "All of (my dogs) act like they've been with me since the day they were born."

Boatfield added that older dogs might already be house-trained or finished with their chewing phase.

## **No two are alike**

In addition to knowing the breed and whether it suits the lifestyle, it's important to check out the breeder or rescue group. Peterson said **responsible** breeders can become mentors to pet owners. And good rescue groups are willing to take dogs back if things don't work out.

In fact Campbell often recommends fostering a dog through a rescue group before making a commitment. It's an opportunity to get to know the breed — and the dog — to see if the fit's right. After all, even with breed consistencies, no two dogs are exactly alike.

"I grew up with a black Lab named Sadie," said Campbell, who now has 32 Labs in her care. But none of them have been the same.

"I've never yet named one Sadie," she said.