

CARE OF DOGS

Dogs are excellent companions. They are loyal and affectionate, and can add pleasure and security to your life. In return, dogs need daily care and attention from their owners.

SELECTION

Choosing the right type and size of dog is very important, and remember that you will be responsible for that dog for at least 10 years.

There are at least 200 breeds of dogs and with a little research you will be able to find one to suit your needs. For instance, it would be foolish to purchase a fiery blue heeler pup to be raised with three children under five in a small suburban yard. Similarly, it would not be acceptable for a Pekingese to round up sheep. Large dogs need lots of room to exercise and the smaller breeds cope quite well in a small environment.

Buy your dog from a reputable source. State Canine Control Councils can provide the names of reliable dog breeders and animal welfare societies such as the RSPCA have healthy dogs for adoption.

FOOD

A well-balanced diet is most essential for a healthy dog. The easiest, most economical and well-balanced diet is a mixture of meat (raw, cooked and canned) and dry food. Plenty of fresh water must be available at all times.

Meat by itself is not a complete diet. Large, fast-growing dogs will have major mineral upsets and skeletal damage if fed only on meat. Check labels on canned food to make sure they are complete dog foods. Remember that all food and water containers should be kept clean

Milk can be given to dogs of all ages, but too much may cause diarrhoea.

A large marrow bone is nourishing and will also clean a dog's teeth and massage the gums. Never give your dog chicken, rabbit, fish or chop bones. Raw bones are best as they are more digestible.

If using complete dog food from a can or packet, feed suggested amounts.

Old or debilitated dogs may have special feeding requirements - follow a veterinarian's advice.

EXERCISE

Regular exercise is most important to ensure a healthy, happy dog.

Ideally, your dog should be taken to a safe area where it can be let off its leash to run freely without being at risk of traffic or a threat to farm livestock or wildlife. Keep your dog within voice command at all times.

HOUSING AND BEDDING

All dogs need shelter- be it inside or outside in the garden - to protect them from the weather. A dog should also be provided with a place to sleep out of the weather which is warm and dry and free of drafts.

Bedding should be an old blanket or hessian bag and should be laundered regularly.

VACCINATIONS

Distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus and kennel cough are still diseases to be reckoned with in dogs and puppies that are not vaccinated. Seek your veterinarian's advice on the best vaccination schedule for your dog.

FLEA CONTROL AND WORMING

Regular worming is also important for the health of a dog. Again, seek your veterinarians advice. Flea infestation can be a problem for many dogs unless regular bathing and flea control is carried out. There are many preparations available which control fleas, but be sure to tend to bedding as fleas breed there as well.

RESPONSIBILITY

As a responsible dog owner you need to consider very seriously having your dog desexed if you do not intend to use the animal for breeding. Desexed dogs are quieter, less inclined to roam and wander and therefore less likely to be at risk of traffic or to be involved in fights and sustain injuries. Most importantly, your dog will not be contributing to the huge unwanted animal population if it is desexed.

Dogs should be registered with your local authority and most councils require you to do so by law. The wearing by the dog of registration tags and an ID tag will ensure that your dog can be easily returned to you should it become lost or stray.

Dog obedience is highly recommended for keeping your dog under your control and for its own happiness. Many RSPCA run dog obedience courses and your local authority can also advise on courses in your locality.