



# Pet Smart



Choosing the right family dog means doing your homework. And not falling for the first pretty face you see.

**C**LOSE YOUR EYES AND PICTURE THE IDEAL AMERICAN FAMILY: Mom, dad, the house with the manicured lawn, the sport utility vehicle—loaded with 3 children and their soccer equipment—and, of course, the family dog.

In this picture of perfection, the dog is usually a retriever of some sort. Friendly, healthy and loyal, he's the perfect dog who always has enough energy to play Frisbee in the backyard, but not so much energy that he feels compelled to chew up your new \$200 loafers.

If you have a dog, you already know that this scenario is, of course, pure Madison Avenue fantasy. So the question, then, is this: What makes the perfect family dog? "That depends on the family," says Tripp Wood, CEO of labpups.com, Inc., and Jaxmax Pet Food, Inc.

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BY MELISSA MATTHEWS PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM SCHMID



He should know. Mr. Wood has spent a great many years breeding Labrador Retriever puppies. Formerly a commercial airline pilot, Wood began breeding Labs for his two young sons. "Early on in my career, it was a way to supplement our income. In the long run, we ended up spending the proceeds towards research for the health and nutrition of Labs and Golden Retrievers," he says.

But spending the money didn't take away from his love of dogs. He continued breeding puppies and, as a pilot, was able to personally deliver the dogs to new owners in many cities. "I gained a lot of knowledge in shipping dogs," he says. Since September 1999, when he started labpups.com, that knowledge has come in handy. He has shipped puppies to such distant locations as Thailand, Aruba, Russia, Greece and Germany.

Wood advises that those interested in welcoming a new puppy into their home consider several key factors before deciding on a particular breed. "Consider the length of time you're home during the day," he says. "Do you have small children, and need a dog that is patient with toddlers? And finally, decide what is more important to you: the dog's looks or its temperament."

There are also factors to consider for those thinking of bypassing the hassle of house-breaking and a closet full of chewed shoes by adopting an adult dog. "A puppy will adjust to fit into your life," says Wood. "Think about how willing you are to fit into an adult dog's life."

### GOOD LOOKS OR A GREAT PERSONALITY?

The distinction between looks and temperament is an important one. Many homeowners like the idea of having a dog that has a championship bloodline. Show dogs, however, are bred primarily for their looks, and can be difficult to train, according to Wood. Field Trial dogs represent the opposite end of the extreme, being bred for raw energy and intelligence. These extremes typically make less than ideal pets for a family situation. The good news is that now you can find a Lab or Golden specifically bred for the family. Wood was the first to establish the Family breed standard years ago. "We spent a lot of time at the pound to discover what people want and don't want in a dog," Wood explains. "We noticed people bringing in Labs because they were too hyper. We wanted to breed a family Lab."

What goes into breeding a "family dog"? Wood outlines a detailed, five-point breeding program to produce toddler-friendly puppies, energetic enough to play Frisbee and swim, but calm enough to enjoy a relaxing evening in the house. These five important points are health, temperament, intelligence, looks, and the desire to retrieve.

No matter how carefully bred, choosing the perfect dog for your family doesn't stop with picking the right breed. Once you've chosen your new puppy, training will

be a very important part of the equation. "Training gives the dog discipline and opens her up to new learning experiences," says Wood. He also begs dog owners to reconsider the popular practice of crate training. "Most training books are written for show dogs," he explains. In addition to being ineffective, Wood cites the dog's spirit as a reason to avoid the crate. "An intelligent dog will be broken with crate training—he may never be the same again."

So, you've done the research. You've chosen the right breed for your family. What will you need to have on hand for your new puppy? That's easy. Wood recommends excellent food and non-chlorinated water. But you don't have to buy out the local grocery store's stock of bottled water. Wood says tap water is fine if you let it sit for a couple of hours before it goes to the dogs.

He also recommends providing a stick to chew on. Yes, a good old-fashioned stick—the kind that literally grows on trees.

When your puppy is at least four months old, you can purchase pig's ears from the pet store if you like. Wood adds that there are some things you should not have on hand for your new puppy, including chew toys from the pet store that can harbor germs from other dogs. He also advises to hold off on pet treats until the puppy is four to five months old. Finally, you may want to consider microchipping your dog. A microchip, which contains information about the dog and his owners, is implanted just under the skin on the dog's shoulder. Veterinarians and animal shelters equipped with the proper devices can scan lost dogs for a microchip, and use the information to contact the dog's owners. Wood, who microchips all of his puppies, tells the story of a late evening phone call he received from a pound. They had a Lab that was about to be euthanized, when they discovered the microchip. The dog's owner had not registered the chip with their contact information, but it was still registered with Wood's. He agreed to come and pick up the dog before 11:00 the next morning. Just one catch—the pound was located in Florida. After an all-night drive, the Lab was saved and eventually reunited with its owners.

After learning all about the proper way to choose a new family dog, I glanced out into my backyard at my five year old Boxer. He's too hyper. He keeps escaping our fenced yard and greeting the neighbors a little too enthusiastically. He can't play Frisbee and, truth be told, he's not very smart. He is far from being the picture perfect dog. But he allows my kids to climb all over him, gently accepting their gifts of half-eaten candy bars and the occasional remnant of Play-Dough with equal gratitude. For better or for worse, we love him. And for us, he is the perfect family dog.

*Melissa Matthews is a Charlotte writer and communications consultant. She has previously written about the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra and Myers Park for FrontDoor.*



### Gourmet Grub

It costs about a dollar per pound, has the highest quality ingredients—including top-grade chicken—and it can be delivered to your door. No, it's not a gourmet meal (at least, not one for you). It's Jaxmax dog food.

Formulated by Doctor Tom Willard, a canine nutritionist with 30 years of experience, Jaxmax is a low carbohydrate, no-sugar dog food packed with the highest grade of chicken and digestible proteins.

At a buck per pound, it's pricier than most major brands found in grocery stores. But, as Tripp Wood, CEO of labpups.com, Inc., and Jaxmax Pet Food, Inc., is quick to point out, your dog will eat less, making the cost somewhat easier to swallow.

Wood claims that Jaxmax can result in a shinier coat and better hair retention. He also says that most dogs that seem to be suffering from food allergies often don't have allergies at all. "It's not what's in the food, it's what's missing from the food that can cause allergy like symptoms," he says. An added bonus: Jaxmax can be delivered right to your door.

For more information on Jaxmax dog food, visit [jaxmax.com](http://jaxmax.com). For more information on Labrador puppies, visit [labpups.com](http://labpups.com), or call 704.392.6140.

