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The Puppy Payoff

Preparing for Your Puppy Companion on a Budget

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Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to bring a puppy into your home! There's no end to the fun and joy that life with a dog entails. The pup's excited, you're excited, and you're both beginning a great adventure! You'll be getting a close relationship with a loyal friend, but you're also taking on some responsibility. Take full advantage of all benefits, but also keep in mind the sacrifices that come with caring for a puppy. Sure you'll need to buy him all the things he needs - and yes, it's a fairly long list - but there are ways to make sure your new puppy doesn't break the bank. Be prepared, and you'll be able to start enjoying the payoff of a puppy companion right away. Have fun!

Getting Ready for Puppy

Choosing Your New Buddy

Maybe you've already visited your pup and put your claim on him. You fell for his little potbelly, his pink nose and squeaky sneeze, or maybe he won you over with his adventurous wobble across the yard. If you've already got your puppy selected, skip this section – unless you want to end up with two puppies to prepare for!

If you're still deciding on which pint-sized companion you want to bring home, there are a few things to consider about different breeds and how this will affect your expenses.

Breed Considerations

Dogs come in all shapes and sizes – you've seen the Chihuahua you can tuck under an arm and the Great Dane that could blend in with a herd of horses. All breeds have their charms, and maybe you already know just what you want. But if you're still on the fence, here are a few things to consider that could affect your budget:

Large or Small? Small dogs make loyal family members that can cuddle on your lap while you watch your TV marathons. They travel easily, fit anywhere, and they tend to need a lot less space to get their energy out. Large dogs are the kings of cuddles and bear hugs, they're hardy and energetic, and they can provide both protection and comfort for you and your family. If you're choosing between a large or small dog, just consider things like the amount of space in your home or yard and the amount of time you have to devote to your dog (large dogs need frequent walks and outings, but small dogs need your attention too).

Energy Level Maybe you've always wanted a border collie of your own, or you dream about a Labrador to hunt and fetch and swim with. These are wonderful dogs, but just make sure you have the active lifestyle to go with them. A cooped up dog gets bored and causes destruction, and a dog-walker also adds to your doggie budget. Research your dog breed to make sure he matches your lifestyle to avoid costly surprises.

Shedding Dogs with beautiful, luscious locks are cuddly and gorgeous – and yes, if you walk that glorious fluff ball down your street you'll get endless compliments from the neighbors. But just keep in mind that long fur means you need to provide a little more care. Make sure your budget is ready for a long-haired dog – think frequent grooming, shaving in the hot summer months, and investment in a quality vacuum and lint-rollers! Not all dogs shed, though, so do some research if you have allergies or don't want to live with a home full of dog hair.

Health Complications While you can never know whether your dog will get sick or develop a condition, you can still research your breed and find out what to watch out for. Large dog breeds can develop hip dysplasia, or heart issues, and some small dogs sometimes have respiratory issues, teeth issues or sensitivity to that bargain-priced, processed dog food. There's no reason your dog won't live a long, healthy life, but doing your research and asking the breeder questions can only help in the long run.

Purebreds vs. Adopted Dogs

Many people picture a specific dog when they imagine their new pet: a shining golden retriever, beefy bulldog, blue-eyed husky or a precious toy poodle. If you have a specific dog in mind, just be prepared to spend several hundred, or even thousand, dollars on that purebred puppy. Yes, you get the dog that looks how you want, she can compete in shows and yes, you get to choose a funny name to fill out on her registration papers. Purebreds are beautiful dogs that make great pets. But remember, just because you spend hundreds on that perfect pooch doesn't mean she'll be the perfect dog. It'll still take some work!

If you want a loving, loyal and beautiful dog but your budget is a little tighter, pet adoption centers all around the country are bounding with happy puppies waiting for you. Besides the benefit of providing a home to a needy dog, adopted dogs are also more affordable (caring people often sponsor dog's adoption fees for you), and they usually come with all their vaccinations. You won't necessarily know who his parents were, how big he'll get, or what breeds are in his family tree, but that doesn't mean he won't be a precious puppy like any other.

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III. Welcoming the Pup Home

He's home and you can both hardly believe it! This is an exciting time and playing with your puppy in her new home is important for making her feel comfortable and for getting to know each other. Make sure to get in lots of initial playtime and feel free to let her familiarize herself with the house. Here are a few tips for beginning training, establishing the rules of the house, and getting comfortable living with your puppy.

Teething

Between three and six months, your puppy will begin teething. She'll want to chew and chomp on anything, from sofa legs to your fingers. It's important not to punish your

puppy for chewing the wrong things, but rather reward her for chewing the right things. This is the time when a selection of puppy chew toys is important – give her a few so she doesn't get bored of one, and praise her for chewing on her own toys. If you ever catch her chewing what she's not supposed to, clap loudly and say 'No!' in a stern voice. This will startle her. Then, present her with a chew toy and praise her for chewing it. This positive communication will teach her what she can and can't do.

Potty Training

One of the trickiest, and also most important, training practices is potty training. No, your dog can't live in diapers for the rest of its life! It's important to use consistent practice for teaching potty training right away. And yes, you're going to need a good cleanser for your carpets and floors at first.

First of all, set up a consistent feeding schedule to help make potty time regular. Try to limit her food in the evening, after around 5 or 6pm, and limit her water after about 8pm. This will help to prevent midnight accidents. Puppies' bladders aren't fully developed yet, so they have less control. You need to help her out as much as possible, but don't punish her for making a mistake.

Pick a consistent spot outside that you take the puppy to when you think she needs to go (usually first thing in the morning, after meals, and before bed). Decide on a specific command, something like 'Go ahead.' Whenever the puppy does her business in the designated area, be sure to reward her with praise.

If you catch your puppy going in an inappropriate place, clap your hands and say 'No!' Don't punish her or rub her nose in it; this will only make her afraid of you. Immediately take her out to the designated spot. Once she finishes there, give her praise. It may seem like a long process, but puppies can read your tone of voice and will eventually learn.

A tip for cleaning up messes – try not to use cleansers with ammonia or a strong scent. These will just attract the puppy to the spot.

Teaching your Puppy Commands

It all starts with 'Sit.' Again, practice the technique of praising the good rather than punishing the bad. Always get your puppy's attention before you start training. Say his name firmly, and wait until he looks at you.

Start by holding a treat like a small biscuit or kibble in your fist. Let your puppy know it's there by bringing the treat close to his head. Keep moving your hand back past the puppy's head and behind him, saying 'Sit' in a firm voice. The puppy will tilt his head back to follow the kibble and will naturally flop down into a sit. Reward him for this each time he does it right. Repetition will eventually teach him the command word 'Sit.' Don't get frustrated; your puppy is learning to use his body and to respond to a foreign language all at once. He wants to please you, so just show him what to do.

Once your pup has gotten the hang of 'Sit' you can move to either 'Down' or 'Stay.' To learn 'Stay,' tell your puppy to 'Sit' while you hold the treat in your hand. When the puppy obeys, give him praise and encouragement, but don't give him the treat just yet. Now give the command 'Stay' in a firm voice, while holding an open hand up to him with your palm facing him. Take a step back. Only reward your pup with the treat if he stays sitting in the same place. Try moving further and further away. Again, practice makes perfect.

To learn 'Down,' tell your pup to 'Sit' and then 'Stay.' Give him praise but keep the treat in your hand. Hold the treat in your fist in front of his face, and then lower it down to the floor. Say the command 'Down.' As the pup follows the treat, he will lay down. Reward him with the treat and praise him when he lies down. Eventually you can teach him to 'Stay' from 'Down' as well.

Teaching your dog to walk calmly on a leash is another important step. Your pup won't be able to go outside or meet other dogs for a few months, until all her vaccinations are done. Your vet will let you know when it's okay to go out.

For a comfortable walk with your dog, you'll want to train her to walk with the leash loose. It's understandable that she'll be excited and energetic on her first walks outside in the big world. But you'll have to be firm without punishing or scaring her. If she tugs too hard or wanders too far behind, give the leash several short jerks. Don't yank too hard, but

tug enough to startle the pup or get her attention. Always praise her when she does what you want. And now that you're out walking, make sure you bring those doggy bags!

If you practice often enough on the leash when your puppy is young, you should be able to work out a good walking relationship. Otherwise, there are small harnesses called gentle leaders that strap over the dog's nose and around the back of her head. This guides the dog by the head rather than the neck, and gives you a little more control. Sometimes big dogs wear harnesses that pull from the shoulders and chest. Other owners choose to use pinch collars, that don't hurt the dog but cause a little discomfort if she pulls too hard.

Walk your dog frequently and practice as much as possible to learn what her habits are. Try to get the hang of walking calmly together on the leash before giving up and considering other options. Usually a little more effort from both of you is all that's needed for walks to become a fun activity for both.