

So You Want To Buy A Rottweiler....

Interested in buying a Rottweiler? You must be or you wouldn't be reading this. You've already heard how wonderful Rottweilers are. Well, I think you should also hear, before it's too late, that Rottweilers are ***not the perfect breed for everyone***. As a breed they have a few features that some people find charming, but that some people find mildly unpleasant and some people find downright intolerable.

There are different breeds for different needs. There are over 200 purebred breeds of dogs in the world. Each breed was created with some specific purposes in mind. There are lap dogs, hound dogs, herding dogs, hunting dogs, and many varied combinations of these and other functions. Before you decide on one specific breed, investigate its history, temperament, and uses to make sure that they mesh well with your own lifestyle. Just because a breed is currently popular does not mean it's the right one for you, and the choice of a dog should be made with the intention of caring for that dog throughout its lifetime.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU ARE ATTRACTED TO THE BREED *CHIEFLY* BECAUSE OF IT'S REPUTATION AS A PROTECTIVE DOG.

While a Rottweiler is a large, impressive breed, true protection is only obtained through a lifetime of training. Even if you do not choose to train in protection, a Rottweiler requires many hours of obedience training and socialization, and can be expected at some point in his/her life to challenge its owner. Some Rottweilers are also slow to bark, coming into their voice at two to three years of age - do not expect your Rottweiler puppy to instinctively warn you of an approaching stranger. There are many other breeds whose "watch dog" capabilities far exceed that of the Rottweiler. If all you are seeking is a dog that will bark at strangers approaching your home, you may want to look at the Labrador, the Standard Poodle, or some terrier breeds.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU ARE UNWILLING TO SHARE YOUR HOUSE AND YOUR LIFE WITH YOUR DOG.

Rottweilers were bred to share in many aspects of a family's daily life, as protective guardians, willing workers, and happy playmates. They thrive on companionship and they want to be wherever you are. They are happiest living with you in your house and going with you when you go out. While they usually tolerate being kenneled for periods of time, or crated inside the house by themselves, they need human contact and socialization in order to remain well-rounded. A Rottweiler who does not receive adequate socialization and attention is likely to grow up to be unsociable (fearful and/or unprovokedly aggressive), unruly, and unhappy. He may well develop pastimes, such as digging or barking, that will displease you and/or your neighbors. An adult so exiled will be miserable too. If you don't strongly prefer to have your dog's companionship as much as possible, enjoy having him sleep in your bedroom at night and sharing many of your activities by day, you should choose a breed less oriented to human companionship. Likewise, if your job or other obligations prevent you from spending much time with your dog. No dog is really happy without companionship but the pack hounds are more tolerant of being kenneled or yarded so long as it is in groups of 2 or more. A better choice would be a cat, as they are solitary by nature.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU DON'T INTEND TO EDUCATE (TRAIN) YOUR DOG.

Basic obedience and household rules training is NOT optional for the Rottweiler. As an absolute minimum, you must teach him to reliably respond to commands to come, to lie down, to stay, and to walk at your side, on or off leash and regardless of temptations. You must also teach him to respect your household rules: e.g. is he allowed to get on the furniture? is he allowed to beg at the table? What you allow or forbid is unimportant; but it is ***critical*** that you, not the dog, make these choices and that you enforce your rules consistently. You must commit yourself to attending an 8 to 10 week series of weekly lessons at a local obedience club or professional trainer and to doing one or two short (5 to 20 minutes) homework sessions per day. As commands are learned, they must be integrated into your daily life by being used whenever appropriate and enforced consistently. Young Rottweiler puppies are relatively easy to train: they are eager to please, intelligent, and calm-natured, with a relatively good attention span. Once a Rottweiler has learned something, he tends to retain it well. Your cute, sweet little Rottweiler puppy will grow up to be a large, powerful dog with a highly self-assertive personality, and the determination to finish whatever he starts. If he has grown up respecting you and your rules, then all his physical and mental strength will work for you. But if he has grown up without rules and guidance from you, surely he will make his own rules and his physical and mental powers will often act in opposition to your needs and desires. For example: he may tow you down the street as if competing in a sled-dog race; he may grab food off the table; he may forbid your guests entry to his home. This training cannot be delegated to someone else, e.g. by sending the dog away to "boarding school", because the relationship of respect and obedience is personal between the dog and the individual who does the training. This is true of all dogs to a greater or lesser degree, but definitely to a very great degree in Rottweilers. While you definitely may want the help of an experienced trainer to teach you how to train your dog, you

yourself must actually train your Rottweiler. As each lesson is well learned, then the rest of the household (except very young children) must also work with the dog, insisting he obey them as well.

Many of the Rottweilers that are rescued from Pounds and Shelters show clearly that they have received little or no basic training, neither in obedience nor in household deportment; yet these same dogs respond well to such training by the rescuer or the adopter. It seems likely that a failure to train the dog is a significant cause of Rottweiler abandonment .

If you don't intend to educate your dog, preferably during puppyhood, you would be better off with a breed that is both small and socially submissive, e.g. a Shetland Sheepdog. Such a dog does require training, but a little bit goes further than with a Rottweiler. In the opposite direction, if your goals in obedience training are oriented towards success at high level competition (HIT, OTCh, and Gaines), please realize that while some Rottweilers can and do accomplish these goals, they are few and far between. The Rottweiler is not among the half dozen breeds best suited to such highly polished performance.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU LACK LEADERSHIP (SELF-ASSERTIVE) PERSONALITY.

Dogs do not believe in social equality. They live in a social hierarchy led by a pack-leader (Alpha). The alpha dog is generally benevolent, affectionate, and non-bullying towards his subordinates; but there is never any doubt in his mind or in theirs that the alpha is the boss and makes the rules. Whatever the breed, if you do not assume the leadership, the dog will do so sooner or later and with more or less unpleasant consequences for the abdicating owner. Like the untrained dog, the pack-leader dog makes his own rules and enforces them against other members of the household by means of a dominant physical posture and a hard-eyed stare, followed by a snarl, then a knockdown blow or a bite. Breeds differ in tendencies towards social dominance; and individuals within a breed differ considerably. Rottweilers as a breed tend to be of a socially dominant personality. You really cannot afford to let a Rottweiler become your boss. You do not have to have the personality or mannerisms of a Marine boot camp Sergeant, but you do have to have the calm, quiet self-assurance and self-assertion of the successful parent ("Because I'm your mother, that's why.") or successful grade-school teacher. If you think you might have difficulty asserting yourself calmly and confidently to exercise leadership, then choose a breed known for its socially subordinate disposition, such as a Golden Retriever or a Shetland Sheepdog, and be sure to ask the breeder to select one of the more submissive pups in the litter for you.

Leadership and training are inextricably intertwined: leadership personality enables you to train your dog, and being trained by you reinforces your dog's perception of you as the alpha.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU DON'T VALUE CONSTANT COMPANIONSHIP AND SOMETIMES PHYSICAL AFFECTION .

A Rottweiler becomes deeply attached and devoted to his own family, and will show this affection in a variety of ways. Some Rottweilers are noticeably reserved, however most are more outgoing, and a few may be exuberantly demonstrative of their affections. They like to be near you, usually in the same room, an almost always with a head or paw in your lap. They will follow you from room to room, and if you are standing still, will lean against your leg. They have been known to upend morning coffee cups by deciding that it's time your hand touched their heads. They are emotionally sensitive to their favorite people: when you are joyful, proud, angry, or grief-stricken, your Rottweiler will immediately perceive it and may respond to your mood. As puppies, of course, they will be more dependent, clownish, and given to testing the limits of their surroundings.

A number of breeds retain into adulthood a less puppyish and playful disposition, e.g. Sheepdogs, Mastiffs and others. Quite a few are far more dramatically demonstrative and/or more clingingly dependent, e.g. the Golden Retriever.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU ARE FASTIDIOUS ABOUT THE NEATNESS OF YOUR HOME.

The Rottweiler's short coarse coat and undercoat do shed . Generally shedding is confined to once or twice per year, but Rottweiler females may "blow coat" during their heat cycles, and some Rotties shed more than others. I don't mean to imply that you must be a slob or slattern to live happily with a Rottweiler, but you do have to have the attitude that your dog's company means more to you than does neatness and you do have to be comfortable with a less than immaculate house.

While all dogs, like all children, create a greater or lesser degree of household mess, many other breeds of dog are less troublesome than the Rottweiler in this respect. The Basenji is perhaps the cleanest, due to its cat-like habits.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU DISLIKE DAILY PHYSICAL EXERCISE.

Rottweilers need exercise to maintain the health of heart and lungs, and to maintain muscle tone. Because of his mellow, laid-back, often lazy, disposition, your Rottweiler will not give himself enough exercise unless you accompany him or play with him. An adult Rottweiler should have a morning outing of a mile or more, as you walk briskly, jog, or bicycle beside him, and a similar evening outing. For puppies, shorter and slower walks, several times a day are preferred for exercise and housebreaking.

All dogs need daily exercise of greater or lesser length and vigor. If providing this exercise is beyond you, physically or temperamentally, then choose one of the many small and energetic breeds that can exercise itself within your fenced yard. Most of the Toys and Terriers fit this description, but don't be surprised if a Terrier is inclined to dig in the earth since digging out critters is the job that they were bred to do.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU BELIEVE THAT DOGS SHOULD RUN "FREE".

Whether you live in town or country, no dog can safely be left to run "free" outside your fenced property and without your direct supervision and control. The price of such "freedom" is inevitably injury or death: from dogfights, from automobiles, from the pound or from justifiably irate neighbors. Even though Rotts are home-loving and less inclined to roam than most breeds, an unfenced Rott is destined for disaster. Like other breeds developed for livestock herding, most Rotts have inherited a substantial amount of "herding instinct", which is a strengthened and slightly modified instinct to chase and capture suitable large prey. The unfenced country-living Rott will sooner or later discover the neighbor's livestock (sheep, cattle, horses, poultry) and respond to his genetic urge to chase and harass such stock. State law almost always gives the livestock owner the legal right to kill any dog chasing or "worrying" his stock and almost all livestock owners are quick to act on this! The unfenced city Rott is likely to exercise his inherited herding instinct on joggers, bicyclists, and automobiles. A thoroughly obedience-trained Rottweiler can enjoy the limited and supervised freedom of off-leash walks with you in appropriately chosen environments.

If you don't want the responsibility of confining and supervising your pet, then no breed of dog is suitable for you. A neutered cat will survive such irresponsibly given "freedom" somewhat longer than a dog, but will eventually come to grief.

READ THIS PARAGRAPH TWICE!

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BUY, FEED, AND PROVIDE HEALTHCARE FOR ONE.

Rottweilers are not a cheap breed to buy, as running a careful breeding program with due regard for temperament, trainability, and physical soundness (hips especially) cannot be done cheaply. The time the breeder should put into each puppy's "pre-school" and socialization is also costly. The "bargain" puppy from a "back-yard breeder" who unselectively mates any two Rotts who happen to be of opposite sex may well prove to be extremely costly in terms of bad temperament, bad health, and lack of essential socialization. In contrast, the occasional adult or older pup is available at modest price from a disenchanted owner or from a breeder, shelter, or rescuer to whom the dog was abandoned; most of these "used" Rottweilers, after evaluation by an experienced handler and vet check, are capable of becoming a marvelous dog for you if you can provide training, leadership, and understanding. Whatever the initial cost of your Rottweiler, the upkeep will not be cheap. Being large dogs, Rotts eat relatively large meals. (Need I add that what goes in one end must eventually come out the other?) Large dogs tend to have larger veterinary bills, as the amount of anesthesia and of most medications is proportional to body weight. Spaying or neutering, which costs more for larger dogs, is an essential expense for virtually all pet Rottweilers, as it "takes the worry out of being close", prevents serious health problems in later life, and makes the dog a more pleasant companion.

Rottweilers are subject to quite a few genetically derived health disorders, however, two conditions in particular are extremely prevalent and can be costly to treat: hip dysplasia and parvovirus. Your best insurance against dysplasia is to buy only from a litter bred from OFA or foreign hip certified parents and [if possible], grandparents. Yes, this generally means paying more. While susceptibility to parvovirus may have a genetic predisposition, there are no predictive tests allowing selective breeding against it. Your best prevention is to follow the vaccination schedule recommended by your breeder in concordance with their veterinarian. As far as other genetically derived health disorders, such as entropion, elbow dysplasia, cataracts and heart disorders, ALWAYS buy from a breeder who gives you a written contract guaranteeing against these disorders. Finally, the modest fee for participation in a series of basic obedience training classes is an essential investment in harmonious living with your dog; such fees are the same for all breeds, though conceivably you will need to travel a bit further from home to find a training class teacher who is competent with the more formidable breeds, such as Rottweiler. The modest annual outlays for immunizations and for local licensing are generally

the same for all breeds, though some counties have a lower license fee for spayed/neutered dogs.

All dogs, of whatever breed and however cheaply acquired, require significant upkeep costs, and all are subject to highly expensive veterinary emergencies. Likewise all cats.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU WANT THE "LATEST, GREATEST FEROCIOUS KILLER ATTACK DOG".

Although the Rottweiler's capability as a personal protection dog and as a police dog have been justifiably well publicized, and occasionally dramatically over-stated, the Rottweiler is not any more capable in these respects than are half a dozen other protection breeds. Nor are all Rottweilers equally capable: some are highly so and some moderately so, but many have insufficient natural capacity for such work. Due to his laid-back disposition, the Rottweiler is, if anything, a bit slower to respond aggressively to a threat than are most other protection breeds. For the same reason, however, the Rottie is perhaps somewhat more amenable to control by the handler and somewhat more willing to follow commands to refrain from biting or to stop biting when told to do so. Whatever the breed, before the dog can be safely protection trained, he must have great respect for the leadership of his handler and must be solidly trained in basic obedience to that handler. Equally essential, he must have a rock-solidly stable temperament and he must also have been "socialized" out in the world enough to know that most people are friendly and harmless, so that he can later learn to distinguish the bad guys from the good guys. Even with such a dog, safe protection training demands several hundred hours of dedicated work by the handler, much of it under the direct supervision of a profoundly expert trainer. Please don't buy any dog for protection training unless you are absolutely committed to the extreme amount of work that will be required of you personally. Also talk to your lawyer and your insurance agent first.

In contrast to the protection-trained dog, trained to bite on direct command or in reaction to direct physical assault on his master, the "deterrent dog" dissuades the vast majority of aspiring burglars, rapists, and assailants by his presence, his appearance, and his demeanor. Seeing such dog, the potential wrong-doer simply decides to look for a safer victim elsewhere. For this job, all that is needed is a dog that is large and that appears to be well-trained and unafraid. The Rottweiler can serve this role admirably, with the added assets of generally dark color and "bestial" appearance adding to the impression of formidability and fearsomeness. If the dog has been taught to bark a few times on command, eg "Fang, watch him!" rather than "Fifi, speak for a cookie", this skill can be useful to augment the deterrent effect.

Other breeds of dog which are equally suitable for protection or for deterrence include the Doberman, German Shepherd, Briard, Belgian Sheepdog, Bouvier des Flandres, Belgian Tervuren, and Belgian Malinois. Of these the first 2 are also recognized by the general public as "police dogs". The Malamute, though not suitable for protection, is quite effective for deterrence due to his highly wolf-like appearance.

DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU WANT A TOTALLY UNAGGRESSIVE AND UNPROTECTIVE DOG.

Most Rottweilers have an assertive and confident personality. When confronted with a threat, a proper Rottweiler will be somewhat more ready to fight than to flee. Thus he may respond aggressively in situations where many other breeds back down. Most Rottweilers have some inclination to act aggressively to repel intruders on their territory (i.e. your home) and to counter-act assaults upon their pack mates (you and your family). Without training and leadership from you to guide him, the dog cannot judge correctly whom to repel and whom to tolerate. Without training and leadership, sooner or later he may injure an innocent person who will successfully sue you for more than you own. With good training and leadership from you, he can be profoundly valuable as a defender of your home and family. (See also remarks on stability and socialization above.)

If you feel no need of an assertive dog or if you have the slightest doubts of your ability and willingness to supply the essential socialization, training and leadership, then please choose one of the many breeds noted for thoroughly unaggressive temperament, such as a Sheltie or a Golden Retriever.

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DON'T BUY A ROTTWEILER IF YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO COMMIT YOURSELF FOR THE DOG'S ENTIRE LIFETIME.

No dog deserves to be cast out because his owners want to move to a no-pet apartment or because he is no longer a cute puppy or didn't grow up to be a beauty contest winner or because his owners through lack of leadership and training have allowed him to become an unruly juvenile delinquent, with a repertoire of undesirable behaviors. The prospects of a responsible and affectionate second home for a "used" dog are never very bright, but they are especially dim for a large, poorly mannered dog. A Rottweiler dumped into a Pound or Shelter has almost no chance of survival -- unless he has the great good fortune to be spotted by someone dedicated to Rottweiler Rescue. The prospects for adoption for a youngish,

well-trained, and well-groomed Rottweiler whose owner seeks the assistance of the nearest Rottweiler Club or Rescue group are fairly good; but an older Rott has diminishing prospects. Be sure to contact your local Rottweiler club or Rescue group if you are diagnosed with a chronic illness or have other equally valid reason for seeking an adoptive home. Be sure to contact your local Rottweiler club if you are beginning to have difficulties in training your Rottweiler, so these can be resolved. Be sure to make arrangements in your will or with your family to ensure continued care or adoptive home for your Rottweiler if you should pre-decease him.

The life span of a Rottweiler is from 9 to 12 years. If that seems too long a time for you to give an unequivocal loyalty to your Rottweiler, then please do not get one! Indeed, as most dogs have a life expectancy that is as long or longer, please do not get any dog!

In Conclusion :

If all the preceding "bad news" about Rottweilers hasn't turned you away from the breed, then by all means DO GET A Rottweiler! They are every bit as wonderful as you have heard!

If buying a puppy, be sure to shop carefully for a *responsible* and *knowledgeable* breeder who places high priority on breeding for sound temperament and trainability and good health in all breedings. Such a breeder will interrogate and educate potential buyers carefully. Such a breeder will continue to be available for advice and consultation for the rest of the puppy's life and will insist on receiving the dog back if ever you are unable to keep it.

However, as an alternative to buying a Rottweiler puppy, you may want to give some serious consideration to adopting a rescued Rottweiler. Despite the responsibility of their previous owner, rescued Rottweilers who have been evaluated by experienced Rottweiler handlers/breeders and vet checked have proven to be readily rehabilitated so as to become superb family companions for responsible and affectionate adopters. Many rescuers are skilled trainers who evaluate temperament and provide remedial training before offering dogs for placement, and who offer continued advisory support afterwards. Contact local Rottweiler breeders, Rottweiler club members, the local humane society, or your local all breed kennel club to learn who is doing Rescue work.

An Afterward:

This article was originally written by Pam Green, a caring and involved Bouvier des Flandres owner, and has been adapted in order to assist in Rottweiler education by Liz Bauer in 1994 with assistance from Lucy Newton of Cornell University.

Pam first wrote this article nearly 14 years ago. Since then it has become a classic of Bouvier literature, reprinted many times. Pam has spent nearly 8 years in Bouvier Rescue, personally rescuing, rehabilitating, and placing 3 or 4 per year and assisting in the placement of others.

Liz has been involved with Rottweilers since the early 1980's, purchasing her first Rottweiler in 1991, and breeding her first solo litter in 1997. She became involved in Rottweiler Rescue in 1986, retired from active rescue in 1996 and currently assists with the evaluation and placement of over 50 Rottweilers per year in association with Joan Sweeney of Wisconsin Rottweiler Rescue.