

Tips on Choosing the Right Dog for You

Take the first important steps of dog ownership by choosing the right dog for you. Get tips on how to best choose the dog.

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Horse people want dogs for different reasons: companionship, protection and sporting competition are just a few. Because of this, it's difficult to generalize what breed or what dog characteristics are the right match for horse owners.

Still, American Kennel Club (AKC) spokesperson Lisa Peterson offers a few suggestions for equine-compatible large dog breeds and small dog breeds: Labrador Retriever, the AKC's No. 1 breed for the past 16 years. Dogs that were originally bred to work with horses, such as the American Fox Hound and English Fox Hound. Small hunting dog, such as the Beagle. Schipperke, popular in the 1970s among the hunter and jumper crowds. Herding dogs: Border Collie, Pembroke Welsh Corgi and Cardigan Corgi. German Shepherds, which are intelligent, easily trained and loyal. Terriers: Parson Russell Terrier (formerly known as the Jack Russell), Norwich Terrier, Cairn Terrier (like Toto from The Wizard of Oz) and Fox Terrier.

If the breed is less important than the dog's individual characteristics, a few desirable traits include: Small dogs tend to make better buddies with horses. "These dogs don't seem to be quite the threat as a Labrador or a German Shepherd. It depends on the individual animal," says animal behaviorist Robert DeFranco. "You want a dog that is a naturally active breed," Peterson says. "In the area of grooming, you want a dog that doesn't have a lot of long, flowing hair," in which shavings and hay can get tangled, Peterson says. "Some dogs have higher prey instincts than others," DeFranco says. A lower prey drive is better for dogs that will be around horses. Hunting and herding dogs like the Labrador Retriever, Border Collie, German Shepherd and Australian Shepherd are examples of breeds with high prey drive, but these are really common "horse" dogs, which goes to prove that even a dog with high prey drive can be managed and his attention redirected.

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