

Planning for a Second Dog

Beth Bradley

Adding a new dog to your home could be a benefit to both you and your current dog. However, successfully adding a new dog depends on several critical criteria. Before you commit to adding a new dog to your household, consider your current dog's manners and temperament; the new dog's temperament and training needs; the time, cost, and energy commitment of adding a second dog.

New Dogs Don't Solve Old Problems

Many people think about getting a new dog to solve problems with their current dog. This is never a good idea! You might think a new dog will provide more exercise for your current dog, entertain your current dog when you leave him home alone, be a playmate when you can't spend time with him, or entertain him when left alone. Getting a new dog will not solve any problems with your current dog. If you have problems with your current dog, such as destructive habits or out of control behavior, then getting a new dog is likely to double your trouble. If, on the other hand, your current dog is well-mannered and obedient, you may find that adding a second dog is worth the required time and energy.

Is your current dog. . .

- Friendly with humans and other animals?
- Well-mannered with visitors (doesn't jump, bark, or bite?)
- Obedient at home and in other environments?

If the answer to any of these questions is *no*, it will not change to *yes* when you bring a new dog into the home. If your current dog needs more exercise, more training, or more socialization, you should address these issues before bringing another dog into the home. Dogs learn from each other. If you are adding a new dog to a home, your new dog will very likely pick up any bad habits of your current dog. Before adding a new dog, consider carefully your reasons and your resolve!

One of the most common reasons I hear for people considering a second dog is that their first dog is lonely. It is true that canines are pack animals. It is instinctive for dogs to enjoy living in a group. Your dog considers the members of your household to be his "pack." As you go about your busy lives, he may find himself left alone—separated from his pack. This separation causes some dogs who are well-behaved when you are at home to engage in destructive behavior when the family leaves the house. While the presence of a second dog can alleviate some of the stress and anxiety, it does not solve the whole problem, nor will it be a quick fix. Introducing a new dog takes time and effort. Your first dog will not immediately view the new dog as a bona fide pack member. Therefore, initially, the new dog may cause additional stress as your first dog wonders why you have left him home alone with an interloper! If your dog suffers from separation anxiety, be sure you address the issue from all angles, rather than hoping a second dog will solve the problem. Strategies for addressing separation anxiety are covered in "Dealing With Separation Anxiety."

Changing Dynamics

Many people think that if they have already made time for one dog in their schedule, that adding a second will be relatively easy. After all, you've already made time for

walks, training, and play time. In fact, dogs have distinct personalities and there is no guarantee that your second dog will fit seamlessly into your current routine. The new dog may need additional training, may need more exercise, or may have behavioral issues that are not immediately apparent. If you are adding a puppy, the work involved will be significant.

Even under optimal conditions, your new dog will change the dynamic of the house. It is instinctual for the dogs to compete to see who is first in the pack order. Ideally, humans should be so clearly the leader that the issue of boss never arises in the dog's mind. Nonetheless, there may be times as your dogs adapt to the new dynamic when the pack order must be reinforced by you.

- There may be challenges between the two dogs over issues of food, toys, or resting spots. You will need to stop any sign of challenges between the two dogs immediately.
- The new dog may challenge your leadership. You will need to firmly and unequivocally make your Alpha position clear from the start.
- Your current dog may take advantage of the distractions brought on by the new dog to try getting away with previously unacceptable behavior. This behavior, too, must be immediately and firmly corrected.

All of these possibilities mean that you will need to spend significant time supervising interactions between your first and second dog until you are sure they are clear about their subordinate roles and what is and is not permitted.

The Bad News

90% of the dogs in shelters will never walk out again. Of the 90%, 25% are pure bred dogs. There are a wide variety of reasons people give for putting dogs in a shelter ranging from the owners not having time for them to the dog is completely out of control. What all of these reasons have in common is that the people surrendering dogs were not prepared for the reality of the dogs they purchased or adopted. Although many rescue groups are doing excellent work to improve the odds,, getting a second dog is not a decision to be undertaken lightly. If it doesn't work out, and you turn the dog over to a shelter, there is a high likelihood you are giving the dog a death sentence. Dogs that are adopted from and returned to shelters have an even lower adoption rate. Rarely do they get a second chance. Do not adopt or purchase a dog unless you are committed to putting in the time and effort to make it work.

The Good News

If you *are* ready to add a dog to your household, there are definitely benefits. Dogs are pack animals. It is in their nature to live in a social group—traveling, playing, and resting with others. If you and your dog are ready, you will enjoy having another “pack member.”

How to Find a Suitable Second Dog

If you determine you are ready for a second dog, choose wisely. First, contact your trainer or behaviorist. In addition to considering size and age, you also need to find the right dog for you current dog. You don't want an active dog if your current dog is a couch potato. You don't want a dominant dog if your current dog is nervous around

other dogs. You want a dog that is mentally stable that will enjoy the company of your current dog and will complement your family and life style. Be honest with your trainer or behaviorist (and with yourself) about your situation so that you can choose the dog that can most successfully integrate into your home.

Conclusion

If you don't have time to train your current dog, don't add a new untrained dog to the mix; you will end of wanting to get rid of both dogs as they will tag team against YOU. Dogs can enrich our lives, but when we bring them into our lives we take on the responsibility to train them and meet their needs. Remember, they didn't ask you to take them home. When you make that important choice, the responsibility is yours!

About Beth Bradley

Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at age 12. She has worked and studied under many renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. After graduating from Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice, Beth worked as a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer. In 1989, she founded her own company and has made dog training and consulting her full-time career since 1995. She is the author of *Real World Dog Training*, and has produced a number of training CDs and DVDs Beth competes with her own dogs in Schutzhund and AKC Obedience. She holds national and international titles, championships, and honors, including representing the United States in the FCI World Trials in both 2003 and 2009. Beth consults for New Jersey shelters and New Jersey law enforcement on cases involving canine behavior and temperament. In addition, she trains and handles dogs for movies and television, with recent credits including *Board Walk Empire*, the *Batman* franchise, *Blue Bloods*, and *The Good Wife*.