

Pet Care



Pet DNA Testing

Now you can check Fido and Fluffy's genetics, too.

No more mystery about what breeds are in your favorite rescue pup. Answers can be just a slobbery swab away.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Embark, one of the most popular testing companies, will take your dog's DNA and compare it to that of more than 350 dog breeds from around the world. The company says they even test for wolf, coyote, dingo and village dog history, covering more than 98% of dogs in America.

The company analyzes the swab using a proprietary DNA microarray that can provide a detailed view of the dog's genome. It says it tests about 256 quadrillion (yes, that's a real number) different possible genetic ancestry combinations.

WHAT CAN IT TELL ME ABOUT MY DOG'S HEALTH?

Some companies claim to be able to tell you about health problems lurking in your pup's genes. But dog genetics experts warn that the science might not be there quite yet.

"You know the research and the research is good, but there are all these caveats on it, and all of a sudden you realize people are using it in a way where they're not taking those limitations into account to make decisions about peo-



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ple's pets," Dr. Elinor Karlsson, a University of Massachusetts professor and director of the Vertebrate Genomics Group at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard told the American Kennel Club. "If you get back a posi-

tive test meaning that your dog is carrying a genetic variant that has been in study correlated or associated with a disease, the one question that you as a pet owner ask is, 'What is the chance that my dog is going to get sick?' And

that is not a question that we can actually answer yet."

WHAT ABOUT CATS?

Basepaws says it's cat DNA test is the most comprehensive on the market. It tests for 43 genetic conditions, includ-

ing dental conditions, and is shareable with your veterinarian. The company looks at 21 breed types from four breed regions. It also tests for blood type, which it says is critical during emergency medical treatments.

Finding a Good Breeder

Adopting a new member of the family can give you the warm fuzzies, and some of the best pets in the world are rescued.

Some families, however, have important reasons for choosing a purebred pet from a breeder. The important thing is to choose a breeder that's reputable. Here are some ways to know a good breeder from a bad one.

ASK QUESTIONS

Start by talking to your veterinarian or potential veterinarian about breeds and breeders. Also ask the traditional sources, such as family and friends, about breeders they've used. You'll also want to look at local dog shows or ask breed clubs to identify breeders in your area. Once you've found one, ask them questions, too, and be honest when they ask you questions. It's in everyone's best interest to give a good home to a healthy, happy pet.

LOOK AROUND

VCA Animal Hospitals says that good breeders should be proud to show you their kennel and let you meet their animals. The area should be well-maintained and clean with plenty of areas of exercise. You can ask and should be allowed to meet your potential pet's parents. They should be friendly and socia-



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ble, and all the animals should be clean and energetic. A reputable breeder should be knowledgeable about the breeds they represent and should easily answer questions about temperament, size, health issues and more.

GET DOCUMENTATION

A reputable breeder should be able to show you where

their animals have received necessary veterinary care, VCA says. They should provide a complete medical record for your potential new family member, as well as a family tree that shows their animals have been tested for hereditary problems. They should also be able to give you references from other happy families. If you choose that breed-

er, they should give you a written contract with a guarantee of health, allowing time for an examination by the veterinarian if your choice.

BE PREPARED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

A reputable breeder may also pepper you with questions. Try not to take offense; they're just making sure their

animal is going to a good home. Be prepared to provide documentation of your own that you have a veterinarian and any other animals in your home receive regular care. You may be asked to provide pictures of a fenced backyard or of a rental agreement that shows you're allowed to have pets. Some breeders may even ask for a home visit.

Adopting Your New Best Friend

There are as many animal rescues out there as there are options for adding an animal to your family.

There are even purebred groups for those interested in that. No matter what animal you're looking to add to your home, there are some things you should do to prepare. Keep reading to learn how to make your home the best possible for your new best friend.

WHY DO PETS END UP IN SHELTERS?

A lot of pets end up in shelters not because of something they did, but because of a lack of housing options, the Humane Society said. If the animal you're considering was an owner surrender, the shelter may be able to tell you the exact reason why the animal ended up there. Some of their pets may have behavior or medical challenges, but a good shelter can make sure you find the best fit for your family.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

There will most likely be a charge associated with adopting a pet. However, the Humane Society says that cost may even be less than a pet acquired for free. The shelter or rescue's fee may cover things such as vaccinations, spaying or neutering, microchipping and other



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medical and behavioral services. You may even get free food, toys and other items from local pet stores.

MAKING SURE THE PET IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Before you head to the

adoption center, carefully and truthfully consider whether a new pet is right for you and your family. Consider questions such as how much time you have to devote to an animal and how much extra expense your budget can

bear. If you can't afford a dog or a cat, you might consider a nontraditional pet such as a rabbit or a mouse. Those pets find their ways to shelters, too.

You should also be prepared to wait for the perfect

pet. The Humane Society says that as shelter pet populations decrease, so do the number of options, and you may have to wait for the perfect pet to come along. Remember that the wait is well worth it.

Setting Up a Reptile Habitat

You've done your homework, selected a reputable rescue or breeder and are ready to bring home your new scaly friend.

Reptiles are the pet of choice in more than 5 million households around the U.S., according to the American Pet Products Association. These critters have special needs, including a habitat that looks and acts like its natural environment.

SPACE

A reptile needs plenty of room to roam. Larger habitats allow your reptile to move around, regulate its temperature by getting close to or far away from a heat source, bask and forage for food. Make sure to build a habitat big enough for the mature animal and not just the baby you may get at the store.

TEMPERATURE

Because reptiles are cold-blooded and unable to regulate their own body temperature, they will need a heat lamp to call their own. Most reptiles need a constant temperature between 70-85 degrees with a basking area that reaches more than 100. Of course, each species has different needs, so consult with the experts at your pet store and your veterinarian for exact specifications.

You'll also need to regulate



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humidity in the enclosure. Tropical species need higher humidity while desert creatures need less of it. Find out your species' preferred method of hydration and go with that. You'll control humidity by ventilation, temperature and through the use of water. High humidity can be maintained by humidifiers, misters and

aerated running water.

LIGHT

Some species of reptile require exposure to certain kinds of light. Collared lizards and green iguanas, for example, need vitamin D3 from sunlight. You may need special kinds of light bulbs set at a certain distance from your pet.

THINGS TO AVOID

Petco lists these things to avoid in your reptile enclosure:

- **Cedar and pine shavings:** These can contain oils that may irritate your reptile's skin.
- **Outside objects:** Branches and other natural objects are great, but you'll need to take precautions to make sure they don't introduce harmful bacte-

ria to your pet. Driftwood and rocks should be soaked for 24 hours in a light bleach/water solution and then in clean water for another 24 hours. Do not introduce living wood to your habitat; the sap can be toxic.

- **Metal objects:** These can contain heavy metals that can poison your pet.

Choosing a Healthy Dog Food

It's important for everyone in your home to eat healthfully, and that includes Fido.

With so many options on the dog food market, how do you know which is the best, most healthy option for your pup? We've got you covered.

DRY DOG FOOD

Kibble comes in many forms, but it's all largely the same thing — food that is processed together, cooked and shaped. The USDA requires that all animal foods, including dog kibble, must be safe to consume, produced under sanitary conditions, contain no harmful substances and must be truthfully labeled. When reading the label on your kibble brand, make sure that a protein is the first ingredient and the best kibbles have a single source of protein, the AKC says. Be wary of grain-free diets because even in dogs, carbohydrates are necessary for energy.

FRESH FOOD DIETS

You can also feed dogs a fresh-made food product that's specially made, meaning cooked, for dogs. The Merck Veterinary Manual warns against trying to manage a fresh food dog diet on your own — we have enough trouble taking care of our own diets, much less the complex



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nutritional needs of our best friends. You can use delivery services and brands that provide refrigerated fresh foods. Just like with kibble, though, make sure you're reading the labels and sticking to the suggested portion sizes.

RAW DIETS

Proponents of the raw food

diet say that these diets give dogs shinier coats, healthier skin, better dental health and increased energy. Raw food diets don't just have to be a pile of raw meat, though, they also come in freeze-dried or dehydrated portions that include organ meats, muscle meats, whole or ground bone, raw eggs, dog-safe fruits and

vegetables and dairy products. There may be special concerns about handling and cleaning some raw foods; talk to your veterinarian to learn more before starting a raw food diet.

FOODS TO AVOID

No matter what kind of diet you and your veterinarian

choose for your dog, there are certain human foods that can be harmful to dogs, and they should never eat them, the AKC says. These include:

- Almonds.
- Chocolate.
- Cinnamon.
- Garlic.
- Ice cream.
- Macadamia nuts.



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How to Care for a Rabbit

Rabbits are the third most popular pet in the U.S., the Humane Society of the United States says.

An adorable, fuzzy bunny can be a great addition to your household so long as you know what to expect. Keep reading for more.

HOW LONG DO RABBITS LIVE?

Rabbits can live for more than 10 years. Unlike other small animal pets, these are not low-maintenance creatures. They can be kept in the house

and free-range with the right training, much like a dog or cat, so you should also look into housing, bunny-proofing supplies and ongoing costs such as food and litter when making your decision.

HABITATS

Rabbits are social animals and, in nature, live in large groups. Your rabbit's housing should take this into account. He should have a place to rest but shouldn't be completely shut off from the family. Appropriate rabbit housing ranges from a puppy pen or large cage to cardboard castles and other housing. You can also provide a litter box for the

rabbit to use as well as plenty of options for enrichment, such as plenty of paper toys to chew.

BUNNY PROOFING YOUR HOME

Rabbits are curious and love to chew. Bunnies have gotten into wiring, rugs, moldings and more, including important documents. It sounds funny until it's you, right? Cover wires with flex tubing (which can also protect your furniture). Use baby gates to block off areas of the home where Bunny can't play safely, but make sure they're made of metal and have slats close enough together so that your rabbit can't squeeze through.

NUTRITION

Make sure you have a good understanding of rabbit nutrition before you bring your bun-bun home. Rabbits cannot live on carrots alone and should have access to unlimited grass hay along with fresh water. You can also feed assorted vegetables that are free of pesticides. Some favorites include basil, celery, clover, collard greens, lettuce, parsley and water cress. Commercial pellet foods are also available and can be fed; check with your veterinarian for more information. Some fruits can be given as an occasional treat. Look for strawberries, bananas, apples (with no seeds) and raspberries.

Choosing a Veterinarian

Your family's veterinarian is going to be your partner for your pet's lifetime. It's important that you choose your pet's medical professionals just as carefully as you would your own.

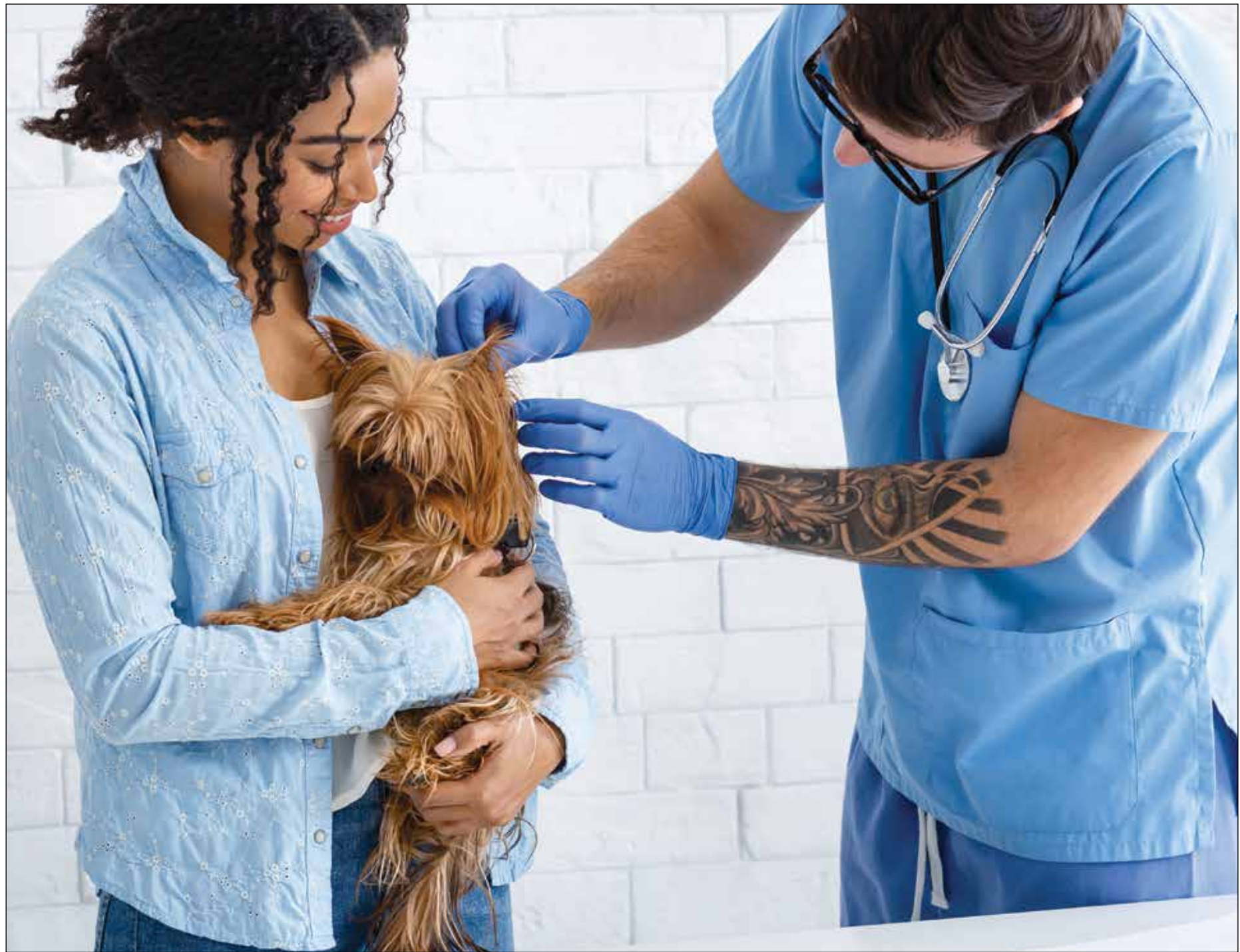
Here are some tips for finding the perfect pet doc from the American Kennel Club.

- Find a veterinarian who specializes in the types of animals you have. You may look for one with reptile experience for your lizard or livestock for your goats. Depending on the types of animals you have, you may have to have relationships with more than one veterinary practice.

- Your vet should share your philosophies about vet care. Ask particular about treating cancer in your pets, spaying or neutering, senior pet care and euthanasia. If your family includes children, ask if they can accompany you for an office visit. Also notice if the vet and staff are patient when answering your questions and how they deal with others in the office.

- Make an in-person visit to the vet practices to check on the cleanliness and organization in the office. Watch how the doctor and the staff interact with animals.

- Look for recommendations from friends, family, groomers,



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breeders, rescues and more. The local veterinary association is a good place to start. If you have specific breeds or types of animals, inquire with those local breed clubs.

- Consider the vet practice's location. Is it easy to get to? Do they provide emergency care or refer you to another

facility? Where is that facility in relation to your home and places you frequently visit with your pet?

- Ask what services this clinic provides and for what services you may need a referral. To whom does the practice refer for specialty care? Can you request appoint-

ments with specific staff and veterinarians?

- Ask about fees and financial assistance options. Have this information ahead of time so you aren't finding out about expenses in the middle of what can be an emotional emergency visit. If you maintain pet insurance, ask if the

practice accepts that insurance ahead of time.

- Look for professional accreditations and certifications. Ask about the education and training of not only the doctor, but also the staff. Does the practice do any continuing education? Are they members of professional associations?