GETTING READY FOR YOUR DOG

The before-they-come-home checklist

Bringing a dog home is exciting, but there can be a surprising amount to organise beforehand. Use this checklist to work through the practical things worth having sorted before your dog arrives. Not everything will apply to every dog or household, so simply tick off what applies to you.

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

LEGAL highlights an item with a legal basis. **IMPORTANT** highlights something we strongly recommend arranging. Everything else is practical preparation.

1. BEFORE YOU COMMIT

- [ ] Everyone in the household is happy about bringing a dog home.
- [ ] We've agreed who will be responsible for feeding, walking, training and everyday care.
- [ ] We've thought realistically about how a dog will fit around work, school and other regular commitments.
- [ ] We've made arrangements for times when the dog may otherwise be left alone for too long.
- [ ] We've considered ongoing costs, including food, routine veterinary care, parasite prevention, grooming where needed, training, insurance or emergency vet costs, boarding/day care and everyday supplies.
- [ ] We've considered what would happen if our circumstances changed, including work, illness, holidays or moving home.
- [ ] If we rent our home, we've checked the rules that apply to our tenancy and obtained any permission we need.

RENTING

In England, rules for relevant assured tenancies changed from 1 May 2026. Other tenancy types and other parts of the UK can differ, so renters should check their own tenancy and current local rules.

2. CHOOSE YOUR VET & SORT THE ESSENTIAL ADMIN

- [ ] We've chosen a local veterinary practice and know how to contact them.
- [ ] We know where to go or whom to call if our dog needs veterinary help when our normal practice is closed.
- [ ] We know whether and when the dog needs an initial appointment with our vet.
- [ ] We've checked what vaccinations the dog has already received and when anything further may be due.
- [ ] We've collected information about current flea, worm and other parasite treatment.
- [ ] We've considered pet insurance and understand what any chosen policy does and does not cover.
- [ ] If we're taking out insurance, we've arranged for cover to begin at the appropriate time.
- [ ] We've obtained the dog's microchip number and checked which approved database holds the record.
- [ ] We've made sure the registered keeper/contact information will be transferred or updated correctly when the dog becomes ours.
- [ ] If we live in Northern Ireland, we've checked and arranged the dog licence requirement where applicable.

LEGAL

Dogs in the UK must generally be microchipped and registered by eight weeks old. When a dog changes keeper, the database details need to be kept correct. Northern Ireland also has dog licensing requirements, subject to exemptions.

3. PREPARE THE HOME

- [ ] We've decided where our dog will sleep.
- [ ] We've created a quiet, comfortable place where the dog can rest without being disturbed.
- [ ] Food and water bowls have a suitable place.
- [ ] Household hazards, medicines, cleaning products and other harmful substances are safely out of reach.
- [ ] Foods that can be dangerous to dogs are stored securely.
- [ ] Electrical cables and tempting chewable items have been moved or protected where necessary.
- [ ] Bins and food waste are inaccessible.
- [ ] Houseplants have been checked and unsafe ones moved out of reach where necessary.
- [ ] We've decided which rooms or areas the dog will initially have access to.
- [ ] Stair gates or other barriers are ready if we'll need them.
- [ ] Everyone understands that the dog's bed or safe space should be left undisturbed.

OUTSIDE

- [ ] The garden or outside space has been checked for gaps and escape routes.
- [ ] Gates and boundaries are secure enough for the particular dog we're bringing home.
- [ ] Garden chemicals, tools and potentially harmful substances are safely stored.
- [ ] We've checked the garden for anything else that could be hazardous to a dog.

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4. THINGS TO BUY

EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS

- [ ] Food suitable for the dog
- [ ] Food bowl
- [ ] Water bowl
- [ ] Comfortable bed or bedding
- [ ] Poo bags
- [ ] Suitable cleaning supplies for the inevitable accidents

WALKING

- [ ] Comfortable, correctly fitting collar
- [ ] Suitable lead
- [ ] Harness if we're planning to use one
- [ ] Suitable walking equipment for the individual dog
- [ ] The required identification is ready for the dog's collar before going out in public.

HOME & ENRICHMENT

- [ ] A few suitable toys
- [ ] Appropriate chews
- [ ] Food or enrichment toys if wanted
- [ ] Treats suitable for training
- [ ] Crate or pen if we're planning to use one

GROOMING

- [ ] Brush or comb appropriate for the dog's coat
- [ ] Dog shampoo if needed
- [ ] Towels
- [ ] Any other grooming equipment appropriate for the individual dog

LEGAL

Subject to specified exemptions, a dog in a highway or public place must wear a collar carrying the owner's name and address. A telephone number is useful, but does not replace the required name and address.

5. FOOD & ROUTINE

- [ ] We know exactly what food the dog is currently eating.
- [ ] We know how much they're being fed.
- [ ] We know their usual feeding times.
- [ ] We have enough of their existing food for the first few days.
- [ ] If we plan to change food, we won't suddenly introduce a completely different diet on arrival unless there is a veterinary reason to do so.
- [ ] We know the dog's current toilet routine as far as possible.
- [ ] We know what exercise they're accustomed to.
- [ ] We've asked about their normal sleeping routine.
- [ ] We've asked what cues or words they're already familiar with.
- [ ] We've found out whether particular toys, blankets or familiar belongings can come home with them.

RESCUE & OLDER DOGS

Some information simply may not be known. That's okay. The aim is to collect what is available, not to create a perfect history where one doesn't exist.

6. PLAN THE JOURNEY HOME

- [ ] We know who is collecting the dog.
- [ ] We've planned the route and allowed plenty of time.
- [ ] We've thought about toilet and water breaks if it's a longer journey.
- [ ] We have water and basic cleaning supplies with us.
- [ ] We've considered whether another adult should travel with us so the driver can concentrate on driving.
- [ ] We've arranged a suitable way to restrain the dog safely in the vehicle.

IMPORTANT

Highway Code Rule 57 says dogs and other animals should be suitably restrained so they cannot distract the driver or injure themselves or other occupants if the vehicle stops quickly.

7. IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO BRING HOME

ABOUT YOUR DOG

- [ ] Date of birth or estimated age
- [ ] Microchip number and database information
- [ ] Vaccination records
- [ ] Veterinary or medical history available to us
- [ ] Details of medication currently being taken
- [ ] Flea, worming and other parasite-treatment information
- [ ] Neutering status, where known or applicable
- [ ] Current food, quantity and feeding routine
- [ ] Known allergies or dietary requirements
- [ ] Known health conditions

ABOUT THEIR LIFE SO FAR

- [ ] Usual daily routine
- [ ] Toilet habits
- [ ] Sleeping arrangements
- [ ] Exercise routine
- [ ] Training already undertaken
- [ ] Words or cues the dog knows
- [ ] Behaviour around adults
- [ ] Behaviour around children, where known
- [ ] Behaviour around other dogs or animals, where known
- [ ] Anything they're known to be frightened or worried by
- [ ] Any known behaviour or handling sensitivities
- [ ] Favourite toys, treats or activities
- [ ] Contact details for the breeder, rescue or previous keeper as appropriate

8. PREPARE FOR THE FIRST FEW DAYS

- [ ] We've tried not to fill the first few days with visitors and excitement.
- [ ] Everyone knows to give the dog time and space to explore and settle.
- [ ] Children understand how to behave calmly around the new dog and when to leave them alone.
- [ ] Introductions to existing pets have been planned carefully rather than left to chance.
- [ ] We've kept the first few days relatively predictable.
- [ ] We're prepared for toilet accidents, disrupted sleep or uncertainty while the dog adjusts.
- [ ] We'll initially keep food and routine reasonably consistent with what the dog already knows where appropriate.
- [ ] We've allowed time for the dog to get to know us before expecting too much from them.
- [ ] We've arranged time away from work or suitable support if needed during the settling-in period.
- [ ] We know whom to contact if we're concerned about the dog's health.

REMEMBER

You don't need to show your new dog their whole new world on day one. Home, safety, rest and getting to know you are enough.

READY FOR ARRIVAL?

- [ ] Permission to keep the dog where required
- [ ] A safe and secure home environment
- [ ] Food they're familiar with
- [ ] Fresh water and bowls
- [ ] Somewhere comfortable to sleep and rest
- [ ] Collar and suitable walking equipment
- [ ] Required collar identification ready
- [ ] Safe restraint arranged for the journey home
- [ ] Microchip information and transfer/update arrangements
- [ ] Veterinary and health records you're entitled to receive
- [ ] Your chosen vet and emergency/out-of-hours details
- [ ] Any medication the dog needs
- [ ] Insurance arranged if you've chosen to insure
- [ ] Enough time, patience and absolutely no expectation that your new dog has read the same checklist!

YOU'RE READY

Once the essentials are in place, the most important thing you can bring home is patience. Let your dog settle at their own pace.