



## How to Adopt a Rescue Dog

**No farm is complete without a trusty farm dog. Contribute to the solution, rather than the problem, by adopting a rescue animal.**

Jack is one lucky Aussie. Turned over to an Oregon shelter as a 2-year-old because his owners couldn't afford to keep him, the future farm dog escaped the tragic fate of so many shelter dogs: euthanasia.

Instead, the staff contacted a volunteer with The Aussie Rescue and Placement Helpline (ARPH), who whisked the beautiful Australian Shepherd into foster care to await adoption as a rescue dog.

### Finding a Rescue

"Laurie Trenholm, of Puppy Hill Farm Animal Rescue, urges adopters to look for a rescue that has operated for awhile and has a good reputation, perhaps one approved by your local PetSmart, and to be cautious of long-distance adoptions.

"Most rescues will take their animals back if there's a problem, but this gets more complicated with long-distance adoptions," she says.

To find rescue organizations and adoptable dogs, check out [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com), where you can peruse adorable pictures and histories of individual pets, or surf over to the American Kennel Club website at [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org) to find a purebred rescue group (click "Clubs," then "Breed Rescue Groups"). More information on the rescue organizations mentioned in this article:

Aussie Rescue and Placement Helpline, Inc.

The Furrytale Farm

Puppy Hill Farm Animal Rescue

Puyallup Animal Rescue

Sweet Border Collie Rescue

For Other Animals ...

From dogs to donkeys, visit our rescue groups.

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"Within a week I knew I wouldn't be able to watch him jump into someone else's car and drive off," says Hilary Hines, the woman who fostered Jack.

The longtime volunteer with ARPH who tends a 12-acre hobby farm in The Dalles, Ore., adds, "Not that he wouldn't have hesitated to do so! He's such a friendly, happy-go-lucky guy."

Hines swiftly signed the adoption paperwork and welcomed her new rescue dog permanently to the farm.

Now, three years later, an ever-cheerful Jack brings smiles to hospital patients and tired nurses as a therapy dog at a local hospital.

This versatile Aussie competes in agility (he's earned several titles), trains in obedience competition and delights in helping Hines with her daily farm chores.

"The sheep have a lot of respect for Jack," she says. "He just has this presence about him and he comes in very handy at feeding time when the sheep want to crowd around me."

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### (Too) Many Rescue Dogs Available

According to an estimate by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), roughly 8 to 12 million dogs and cats enter our shelters each year; a shocking 5 to 9 million of these are euthanized for lack of space and resources to care for them.

At the same time, an undetermined number of luckier pets, like farm dog Jack, find new homes through no-kill rescue organizations often staffed by volunteers. These rescue animals, usually kept in a network of volunteer foster homes, will live in their temporary abodes as long as it takes to be adopted, but that doesn't mean they don't need permanent homes.

"People often say, 'Oh, you're a no-kill shelter—that's great!,'" says Laurie Trenholm, a university professor who started Puppy Hill Farm Animal Rescue in Melrose, Fla., with her husband in 1999.

"But the majority of our animals come from the shelter. If we can't move our animals out, we can't take animals in."

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### Start Looking for Your Rescue Dog

If you're looking for a tail-wagging addition to your farm family, this article will offer you some persuasive reasons to come to the rescue of a dog in need.

But first, please take some time to consider what you're doing. Are you willing and able to care for a dog, make this sensitive and social animal a treasured part of your family, and commit to giving it a lifelong home through thick and thin?

### Going Home, Sweet Home

Congratulations, you've adopted a rescue dog into your farm family, an animal capable of amazing devotion, forgiveness and resilience.

As you bundle your new pet into the car and drive to your farm, remember that your dog may—or may not—pull a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde act when you first arrive home.

Don't just toss him out with your other animals and expect everybody to live together in perfect harmony from the start.

Introductions to other pets and livestock should be accomplished gradually and safely, keeping them separated in the beginning and then supervising interactions closely.

"People come here and they see a very balanced, good-natured dog because it's been living here at the rescue," explains Lillie Goodrich, founder of Sweet Border Collie Rescue.

"But when the dog goes to a different home, it will have a meltdown—it might have diarrhea or hide somewhere.

"So keep your rescue dog's life simple for the first few weeks and let it get used to your family and your home. It takes about three months for a rescue dog to really relax and understand it's not leaving."

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### Rescue Dog Pros

Thanks to the serious problem of pet overpopulation caused by indiscriminate breeding, acquiring a dog has never been easier.

Turn to the classified ads of any major newspaper and you'll see canines galore of every breed, breed composition and price.



“Free Dog to Good Home” flyers plaster bulletin boards at the post office, the veterinary hospital and the feed store. Your neighbor thinks, “Having one litter of pups would be such a cool experience for the kids!” or “My Labrador Retriever is so awesome; let’s breed her!” and up pops another “Puppies for Sale” sign.

While it’s true that good, reputable dog breeders—the kind who screen buyers, test for health problems and will take a dog back if needed—exist, there are all too many inexperienced people breeding dogs just to make a buck, says Trenholm.

#### Six Other Ways to Help

Even if you’re not currently looking to add a new pet to your farm family, you can still assist your local rescue organization or shelter in helping animals.

Viki Pearson, founder of Puyallup Animal Rescue in Puyallup, Wash., suggests the following: Donate money, food, litter, blankets, toys and other needed pet supplies. Volunteer to help on adoption days, raise funds, etc. Offer to foster a dog or cat in your home until it’s adopted. Volunteer to train/exercise a dog or socialize puppies and kittens. Outfit your own pet with a collar, ID tag and microchip. Spay or neuter your pets!

TopShe explains that in the Gainesville area, for example, a lot of Pit Bull breeding goes on, flooding the rescue with Pit-mix puppies that can be difficult to place in the right home.

Buying a dog from a backyard breeder or taking a free dog off someone’s hands does nothing to help solve the pet overpopulation crisis and often encourages even more indiscriminate breeding.

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#### The Benefits of Rescue Organizations

Rescue organizations, on the other hand, tackle the problem head-on by devoting much of their resources to spaying and neutering animals accepted into the program before they’re adopted out again.

The adoption route also carries some clear benefits over buying a backyard-bred canine or snatching a free, too-cute-to-pass-up pup outside the supermarket. The biggest perk? It feels good to rescue a dog that needs a home, to give it another chance at happily-ever-after, to save a life. Really, really good.

“The thing people tell me all the time is that they feel they’ve done the right thing by rescuing a dog,” says Lillie Goodrich, who has re-homed over 900 Border Collies through her Sweet Border Collie Rescue in Morris, N.Y.

She strongly believes that rescue will always be important for this intelligent, flashy and high-energy breed (which was unfortunate enough to have been prominently featured in a popular movie, “Babe,” to boot).

“The problem is that the breed isn’t meant to live on quarter-acre lots in suburbia, but the desire to have them because they’re pretty and smart is high. Often these dogs have just landed in the wrong home: The emotional benefit [of rescuing a Border Collie] is knowing you have the ability to respond to the needs of this breed.”

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#### The Fee is Worth It!

Rescuing a dog has practical benefits, too. For one, adoption fees for purebreds and those wonderful, often genetically healthier mutts are much less than the price of a purebred dog from a breeder, notes Sloan.

Although she hastens to add that if someone seems overly concerned about the adoption fee, she’ll advise the person to look elsewhere.

“Caring for an animal costs a lot of money,” she says. “My philosophy is, ‘What you get for nothing, you treat like nothing.’ We put adoption fees on our animals because we want them going to people who will value them.”

If you do the math, the pet adoption fees—essentially donations—that enable rescue groups to continue their important and expensive work, are a bargain, even compared to a freebie dog.



A puppy coming into Trenholm's rescue, for instance, will at minimum be spayed or neutered, vet checked, dewormed, treated for fleas and vaccinated. "If folks take a free puppy out of the paper, it would cost \$250 to \$300 from a veterinarian in our area to have that done—and our adoption fee is only \$100," she explains.

A good rescue will evaluate the temperaments of dogs they take in, and can offer you training and behavioral assistance and referrals after adoption.

Furthermore, most rescues have you sign a contract that states if a problem occurs or an issue arises that prevents you from keeping your pet—say, your child develops an allergy—you'll return the animal to them to re-home. You would be hard-pressed to find a backyard breeder or an owner, desperate to unload a dog, willing to do the same.

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#### Adoption Considerations

Just because a dog has found its way into rescue doesn't mean it automatically has behavioral issues.

Good dogs come into rescue for many different reasons. The owners may have:  
Passed away  
Discarded their pet before moving  
Or may lack the time to exercise an energetic breed

Still, unlike the frolicking young pup purchased from a reputable breeder and raised in your own home, a rescue dog's background is often shrouded in mystery. Did the dog receive proper socialization as a puppy to people and to other well-behaved canines? Did it suffer abuse or neglect?

"People have to be prepared to help a rescue dog adjust emotionally," says Goodrich. "The downside [of rescue] is you have a dog that needs longer to adjust, requires more patience and might not be able to handle everything you expect it to handle because in its history something has gone wrong.

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#### Choosing a Rescue Dog

Before you even contact a rescue organization or visit a shelter, you and your family should first talk about what kind of dog you're looking for in terms of size, energy level, personality and other factors.

Do you want a couch-potato canine who doesn't demand a ton of exercise or an athletic dynamo of a dog to herd your flock of sheep?

Do you desire a social butterfly who dotes on everyone or a more aloof dog that will bark at strangers?

Thoroughly research the breeds that interest you and learn about their characteristics, health issues, grooming demands and exercise needs.

Be honest with yourself when evaluating your lifestyle and what dog would be compatible with it. Realize that some traits are hallmarks of the breed and no amount of training or wishful thinking will change them, such as a Border Collie's instinct to herd or a Beagle's urge to follow his nose.

You'll find valuable breed information in Dog Fancy magazine, in books like *Paws to Consider: Choosing the Right Dog For You and Your Family*, by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson (Grand Central Publishing, 1999), and on the Internet.

Once you've done your homework, you can take the next step of visiting the shelter, attending a pet rescue "Adoption Day" or contacting a rescue to see what dogs they have available, fill out an adoption application, and schedule a visit.

Be prepared to answer a lot of questions that will not only help the rescue volunteers match you with the right dog, but also determine if you can meet this animal's needs.

"Basically, adopters need to demonstrate that they'll be good, committed pet owners," says Trenholm.

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#### Rescue Requirements



Rescues vary as to their adoption requirements. Many require a home visit and references, including a veterinarian's, and most insist that you have secure fencing to confine the dog when it goes outside.

Sloan's rescue, for example, won't place dogs in a family where both owners work full time and the dog will be left home alone all day, or where it has to live outdoors 24/7, an outcast from the human "pack."

Keep in mind that choosing a rescue dog should be a family affair. Goodrich insists that the entire family come to look at an adoption prospect—and that means any other dogs as well—to see if everybody gets along.

"You can't just have Mom go pick out the dog," she stresses. "How do you know if the dog is shy of men or way too much for the kids? It's not that she can't choose one, but if you look at it from the dog's point of view, he needs to meet everybody."

When you finally have the opportunity to meet a rescue animal nose-to-nose, Trenholm advises focusing on the inner dog and compatibility issues rather than let its outward appearance dazzle you.

"Sometimes I have people get enamored with the look of the dog, but it's kind of like picking somebody to go steady with—you've got to get to know the animal," says Trenholm. "Find out as much as you can from the rescue people about the dog's personality, its energy level, its likes and dislikes. Is this dog aggressive with other animals? They'll tell you what they know—listen to them!"

And if the rescuer says the pooch you want won't work in your situation (as in, "Yes, Brutus here will eat your chickens"), remember that the individual has undertaken this volunteer work out of a love for dogs and probably has enough experience with the breed or dog in question to know what they're talking about.

"The biggest beef I have as a rescue person is that people think I'm trying to deny them a dog," says Goodrich. "But I'm actually trying to match a dog to their needs."

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#### Did You Pick the Right Rescue Dog?

But how in the world do you really know whether you've found the right dog or not?

No one can definitively answer that question for you, but Goodrich suggests picturing the following scenario to figure this out for yourself: You're in the car and driving away from the rescue. You look over your shoulder and the dog you met isn't sitting there in the back seat. How would you feel? Like you'd left your heart behind? Relieved?

"I always tell people, your heart has to be pulled," she says. "If you don't feel drawn to this dog, then it's probably not your dog."

Hilary Hines, of course, understands what it's like to feel a rescue dog's tug on your heartstrings and know he has to be yours—forever. "Jack," she says, "is my heart and soul."

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About the Author: Cherie Langlois is a lifelong dog owner and freelance writer in Washington who writes regularly for Hobby Farms, Hobby Farm Home and Dog Fancy. In her spare time, she volunteers with Puyallup Animal Rescue.