

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

# Mixed Breeds

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Understand your  
mixed-breed dog

Discover tips and tricks for the  
most effective training techniques

Share your life with your new  
mixed-breed companion

**Miriam Fields-Babineau**

Animal trainer, psychologist, zoologist,  
and prolific author





# Mixed Breeds

2nd Edition

**by Miriam Fields-Babineau**

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

## Mixed Breeds For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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# Introduction

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A mixed-breed dog, as the name implies, is one that's a mix of two or more breeds — as opposed to purebred dogs, which can trace their lineage back to purebred parents and grandparents and on and on. Believe it or not, mixed-breed dogs are more numerous than purebred dogs and, until recently, they were thought of as less-than-ideal pets and companions. But with the new designer-dog hybrid craze, all that has drastically changed. Many people are willing to spend upwards of \$2,000 for a mixed-breed dog just because they know the dog's parents were purebreds.

Even though mixed-breed dogs — designer or not — may not have consistent attributes (like size and appearance), they can make *great* companions, often with fewer physical problems than pedigreed dogs.

I should know: I've been training dogs for more than 40 years. Plus, my studies in psychology and zoology have gone a long way toward helping me understand why dogs behave the way they do. I've written and published numerous articles and books about dogs, their behavior, care, breed specifics, and training. I've researched numerous breeds, including their characteristics and behavior. And as a professional trainer, I've worked with many breeds and breed mixes, teaching them to behave and live harmoniously with their human companions as well as other animals.

In this book, I've brought together all the material you need to help you live with and train your mixed-breed dog. **Remember:** A dog doesn't have to have a pedigree to be a good companion. It merely has to have quality care, guidance, consistency, and understanding. *Mixed Breeds For Dummies* will help you develop a great relationship with your mixed-breed dog.

## About This Book

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Although you'll find all kinds of useful information in each chapter of this book, you don't have to read it all to benefit from it. Each chapter contains all the tools you need to accomplish specific goals.

Though this book declares to be about mixed-breed dogs it's actually about *all* dogs, because mixed-breed dogs are the combinations of many dogs. Although designer dogs are actually hybrids, consisting of the breeding of two purebreds, mixed breeds often contain more than two breeds — sometimes as many as ten, or more, depending on the genetics of the parents. The information in this book pertains to all breeds of dogs, so whether you have a mixed-breed dog or a pure-bred dog, you'll benefit from reading this book.

Also, it's true that I have lots of credentials — from degrees to publications to hands-on experience — but this book isn't about my standing up on a soapbox and lecturing you. I know you're busy, so in this book, I tell you only what you need to know and nothing that you don't.

If you're short on time, you can safely skip the sidebars (text in gray boxes) — the information they contain is interesting but not critical. You can also skip any paragraphs marked by the Technical Stuff icon (see “Icons Used in This Book,” later in this Introduction, for more information).

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

## Foolish Assumptions

Because you've picked up this book I assume you're not a dummy. You're either thinking of getting a mixed-breed dog or you already own one. Plus, the fact that you want to find out more about your dog makes you exceptionally intelligent. I make some other assumptions about you:

- » I assume you have, or are about to get, a mixed-breed dog because you wanted a unique individual to love and live with.
- » I assume that you want just the facts you need to make certain you accomplish your goals. You don't want all the scientific jargon and terminology explaining the background of each topic.
- » I assume you have a big heart to take on a dog and give her a happy home.



# Icons Used in This Book

Icons are those little eye-catching pictures in the margin of this book. These icons are eye-catching for a reason: They flag important information. Here's what they mean:



TIP

The Tip icon helps you solve problems faster or explains an easier way to approach an issue.



WARNING

The Warning icon prevents you from doing something dangerous to your dog, yourself, or others. Heed this icon!



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

The Technical Stuff icon precedes interesting information, though not vital to your mixed-breed dog's well-being. Although you really don't need to read the information preceded by a Technical Stuff icon, you won't lose much time doing so, and it may help you understand your dog better.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon helps you stay on track in maintaining your dog's health and well-being. This information is so important I may say it twice!

## Beyond the Book

In addition to the book you have in your hands, you can access some extra content online. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for questions to ask when adopting a dog, tips on temperament testing, and a checklist of supplies to have on hand. Just go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type **Mixed Breeds For Dummies** in the Search box.

## Where to Go from Here

Because this book is written in a modular manner — with each chapter a stand-alone unit — you don't have to read everything in order. In fact, if you already have a mixed-breed dog, you won't need to read the chapters on where to find a dog, nor will you need the information on making sure the dog is right for you. If you get a designer dog, you might want to find out more about how to train her

than solve problems that she likely hasn't developed. Or, if you've had a mixed-breed dog for many years and are curious about the changes he'll be going through as he ages, you may want to skip to the chapter about senior dogs. Use the Table of Contents and Index to find the chapters that appeal to you now, and come back to this book as your needs and interests change.

Regardless of where you begin reading, you're sure to discover new things giving you the inspiration to spend time with your mixed breed and enhance your lives.

Yours is a partnership for life. Have fun together!

# 1

## **Getting Started with Mixed Breeds**

**IN THIS PART . . .**

Find out what makes a mixed-breed dog a mixed breed.

Look at what goes into a designer dog.

Decide which mixed breed you want.

Meet and pick out the dog who's right for you.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding what makes a dog a mixed breed
- » Recognizing that size doesn't matter — a dog is a dog
- » Remembering that your dog — no matter his mix — wants to be your best friend

## Chapter 1

# Mixing It Up: Introducing the Mixed Breed

**T**he offspring of purebred dogs all look alike on the outside, and have similar personalities and temperaments. You can't say that about mixed-breed dogs. No two are exactly alike — even those from the same litter. Although their environment has a lot of impact on their future behavior, they still have specific genetic codes that are difficult to decipher.

Mixed-breed dogs — especially so-called “designer dogs” — have recently experienced a surge in popularity. Though actually hybrids — the offspring of two purebreds — designer dogs are highly prized for their unique characteristics. Designer dogs are very expensive, because they're in short supply and highly desired.

Very small mixed breeds have also become very popular. They're easy to transport, can be carried in a handbag, and offer all the affection and playful antics of their larger cousins. From 3 to 7 pounds, so-called “pocket dogs” are gaining ground, probably fueled by the fact that they're carried by their celebrity owners down the red carpet. Many of the current, popular pocket dogs are hybrids — the mix of two very small purebred dogs.

Most dogs — regardless of their breed or size — merely want to be with their human companions. Your dog looks to you for direction, companionship, food, shelter, and understanding. In return, your dog offers friendship, trust, and love. He'll never grow up and move away, he's there when you need someone to talk to,

and he's always ready to join in a game. Your dog doesn't have to be purebred to fulfill your needs. After all, your dog doesn't know what purebred is — all he knows is that he wants to be with you.

## A Mutt by Any Other Name: Defining Mixed Breeds

A mixed-breed dog is one who has been conceived by two different purebred or mixed-breed dogs. The parentage of many mixed-breed dogs is unknown, because the breeding wasn't planned. Two unsterilized dogs crossed paths when the female was in heat, and the rest is history.

Mixed-breed dogs are sometimes called mutts, mongrels, or Heinz 57 dogs. No matter what they've been called, they haven't traditionally been the sought-after purebred dog that people pay a lot of money to buy.

In recent years, though, mixed-breed dogs have become more popular. The American Kennel Club (AKC) has officially created a new grouping for mixed-breed dogs — the All-American — through its AKC Canine Partners program ([www.akc.org/register/information/canine-partners](http://www.akc.org/register/information/canine-partners)). Now mixed-breed dogs can participate in any performance event that was formerly the domain of purebred dogs, including certifications such as the Canine Good Citizen (CGC; [www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/canine-good-citizen](http://www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/canine-good-citizen)) and AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy programs ([www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/canine-good-citizen/akc-star-puppy](http://www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/canine-good-citizen/akc-star-puppy)). Mixed-breed dogs are also being put to work as service dogs, therapy dogs, and search-and-rescue dogs. They're valued as pets and companions. And in some parts of the world, owning a mixed-breed dog is considered chic.

Each mixed-breed dog is unique. Even designer dogs don't meet any specific standard, such as those seen in purebred dogs. There's no guarantee of the adult dog's height, appearance, or temperament. What happens happens.



WARNING

Although some designer-dog breeders claim that their mixed-breed pups are healthier due to breeding two different breeds together, this isn't always the case. The health of the pups depends on the two individuals who are mixed. Only through careful testing of the parents — such as X-raying hip joints, testing the eyes and heart, testing blood for specific diseases, and temperament testing for overall personality — can a breeder be somewhat certain that the offspring will be healthy. Although most professional purebred dog breeders do these tests, few designer-dog breeders do so. And you can be sure that the owners of those wandering pets who crossed paths didn't do so either.



REMEMBER

A designer dog is a dog whose parents were both purebred dogs, of different breeds. For example, a Golden Doodle has one parent who is a purebred Golden Retriever and another parent who is a purebred Poodle. His mother may have been the Poodle, and his father may have been the Golden Retriever — or vice versa. The designer dog was bred intentionally by a designer-dog breeder. A non-designer mixed-breed dog is a dog who was bred either intentionally or by accident. One or both of his parents were *not* purebred dogs.

Even though you have no idea what your mixed-breed puppy will grow up to look like, there *are* ways to be sure he'll still be a good pet. Your good care, training, and love will make him the ideal companion. It doesn't matter what others might think when they see your short-legged, long-backed, droopy-eared, multicolored dog with the overshot jaw and wrinkled forehead. All that matters is your love and devotion to him, which he'll return tenfold.

## A Tale of Two Dogs: How Mixed-Breed Dogs Come to Be

The story of mixed-breed dogs is often a sad one. Many people see them as a lower caste of animal — with no heritage and an unknown future. They overpopulate animal shelters and humane societies. They roam the streets in cities, suburbs, and rural areas, menacing wildlife and small pets. In their search for food, they raid garbage cans and alleyways. If captured by animal control, few are claimed, and most are put to sleep.

Just as people throw out old computers, or clothing that's no longer in style, mixed-breed dogs often suffer the same consequences when their owners no longer want to be bothered to care for them. The most common scenarios:

- » Someone falls in love with a mixed-breed pup, but quickly tires of the pup as he grows and develops behavioral problems (because the person treated him more like a toy than a dog). Broken toys are thrown away; mixed-breed dogs are abandoned in the streets or at local animal shelters.
- » Someone wants to let her children experience the wonders of birth. How great is it to watch puppies being born and nursing! How cute the puppies are as they crawl around! Seeing the pups' eyes open for the first time, watching them eat solid food for the first time, and watching them play with each other — what could be better? But when the pups' mother no longer cares for them, the task of feeding and cleaning up after the puppies falls on the adult in the house. And if homes can't be found for the pups, they're abandoned.

## HOW TO TELL WHERE YOUR DOG CAME FROM

The best way to figure out the breeds that make up your mixed-breed dog is to look through an encyclopedia of purebred dogs. Most mixed breeds have *some* appearance or personality that resembles one of the parent breeds. Often, you just have to look at color, coat type, or size to have a vague idea of which section to look in. For example, if the dog is large, has a beauty mark on the cheek, and has upright ears, there's a good chance he's part Shepherd. If the dog is small, with long silky fur and a short nose, there's a good chance she's part of some Toy dog breed, likely some Pekingese.

Make a list of your dog's attributes. Compare them to those you see in the encyclopedia of purebred dogs or head to Chapter 3, where you can find an overview of the different breed groups. When you have a fairly good idea of your mixed-breed dog's genetics, read more about those breeds to learn about their behavior, temperament, and health-related issues. Doing so will help you know your dog even better than you already do!

» A dog just gets loose. The dog's owner tried to keep him contained, but where there's a will, there's a way, especially if the air is carrying the odor of a female dog in season, which many male dogs can detect from more than a mile away. It's not unheard of for a male dog to climb a high fence to escape or boldly run through an invisible fence's electronic field.



WARNING

An unhappy dog without companionship will do what he can to get loose and find company. Dogs who are tethered outdoors break their ropes; those in pens dig under the fence; many in yards jump over a fence or take advantage of open gates because they want to find other dogs. And when they find other dogs, they often procreate — and then more unwanted mixed breeds enter the world.

Rarely does breeding of mixed-breed dogs happen intentionally. Though unplanned, many mixed-breed dogs can still bring joy and love to your life. Don't judge the dog on how he came to be, or where he was found — instead, consider how happy and fulfilling a future shared with that mixed-breed dog can be!

## Even Toy Dogs Aren't Toys

"Mommy, Daddy, can I have a dog?"

Many families give in to their little one's wishes without thinking long and hard about it first. And many other people give a friend or loved one a dog for a holiday



or birthday gift — not knowing whether the person really wants the dog or is prepared to care for him. Unfortunately a good percentage of these “gifts” end up at the local animal shelters just a few months down the road — much like a toy that no longer works or isn’t played with anymore.



REMEMBER

Dogs take work. Yes, they’re adorable — as puppies and adults — but putting time and energy into the care of your dog is essential if you want a happy, healthy companion. Think seriously about how much time you have to give before you commit to getting a puppy or adult dog. If you can’t give a dog proper care, you’ll do yourself and the dog a favor by not bringing him home.

Proper care goes hand in hand with overall health and well-being. In Part 2, I let you know how to give your mixed-breed dog a good home, feed him correctly, groom him, and exercise him. A healthy dog is less likely to develop health and behavioral issues. Bottom line: If you take good care of your dog physically, he’s less likely to develop the kinds of behavioral problems that result in many dogs ending up in shelters, without homes.

Training is essential for every dog — big or small. A trained dog is happier, easier to live with, and more accepting of new situations. If all dogs were trained as puppies, the animal shelters wouldn’t be nearly as full. In Part 3, I guide you through the training process, as well as help you understand the special problems that can occur in mixed-breed dogs. As your dog ages, he’ll have special needs. In Part 4, I also discuss how to recognize signs of age-related behavioral changes, possible physical changes, and when the right time may be to let him go.

Any kind of dog can be a valued family member. What you get from your dog is entirely dependent on what you put *into* the relationship.

## They Don’t Call ‘Em Man’s Best Friend for Nothin’

Wondering what you can do with a mixed-breed dog? Anything! You may not be able to compete in purebred dog club shows, but similar certificate-awarding shows are available for mixed-breed dogs. You and your dog are teammates in all performance activities. Your mixed breed can

» **Participate in obedience trials.** These are tests of your dog’s response to obedience commands. See Chapter 16 for more information.

- » **Participate in agility.** Not only does this challenge your dog physically, but also tests how well you communicate with him while in action. See Chapter 16 for more information.
- » **Compete in flyball.** This is a relay team event with four dogs/handlers per team. The dogs run down a lane to fetch a ball and return. The fastest team wins.
- » **Take the Canine Good Citizen test.** This test is a way of testing your dog's obedience and temperament in public. (It's not a competition.)
- » **Work as a therapy dog.** Your mixed breed can bring joy to others by going to nursing homes, hospitals, and care centers.
- » **Work as a service dog.** Service dogs perform important tasks for those who are unable to. They are guiding eyes for the blind, ears for the deaf, and hands for those without.
- » **Assist with search-and-rescue operations.** Search-and-rescue dogs find lost people and save their lives.

In Chapter 17, I explain how to travel with your dog. I fill you in on preparing for your trip and help you make sure your dog is safe, secure, and relaxed during the trip, whether you're traveling by plane, train, or automobile. Because many dogs get stressed — or homesick — while traveling, I let you know what to do to help your dog become a traveling gent.

Mixed breeds can perform jobs to help people, save people, and inspire people. They're stars on the screen, stage, and television. They're heroes in the line of duty or while sifting through debris. They keep our borders safe, sniffing out dangerous chemicals and drugs.

Many mixed breeds have a bad start, but you can change that by adopting one that steals your heart. Just one stroll through an animal shelter or humane society, and you're bound to find one, or two, who'll give you the love and devotion you're looking for.

They don't call dogs man's best friend for nothing. Nobody can love you like a dog.

- » Hearing the hype about hybrids
- » Identifying the pros and cons of hybrid dogs
- » Looking at the most popular designer dogs

## Chapter 2

# Designer Dogs: Not Your Mother's Mutt

**W**hat do Julianne Moore, Uma Thurman, and Jake Gyllenhaal have in common? No, they haven't all won Oscars. They all have Puggles — the designer-dog hybrid of a Pug and a Beagle. Designer dogs are growing in popularity, and they're often more expensive than purebred pups. Why? Because they're unique.

So, why would someone pay upwards of \$1,500 for a mixed-breed dog when he can go to the local animal shelter and adopt one for \$30? Aren't all mixed-breed dogs unique in their own ways? Yes — but not all mixed-breed dogs purposely designed. Not all mixed-breed dogs have pedigreed parents. Not all mixed-breed dogs have a well-documented lineage. Designer dogs are intentionally chosen to create a specific appearance and temperament in the offspring. The puppies are calculated, created, and planned. Most mixed-breed dogs are accidents — but there's nothing accidental about a designer dog, and many people are willing to pay more to get one.

Designer dogs are not without controversy, though. Purebred dog *fanciers* (a fancy name for people who are enthusiastic about dogs) are vehemently opposed to mixing their purebred dogs with any other breed. In this chapter, I fill you in on the pros and cons of designer dogs, so you can decide for yourself whether they're right for you. I also let you know which designer dogs are the most popular, and tell you a bit about those hybrids and what you can expect if you get one.

# The Pros and Cons of Designer Dogs

Although breeders of designer dogs feel they're meeting the needs of a particular niche of people, purebred breeders and purebred dog clubs, such as the American Kennel Club (AKC), think the entire trend is dangerous to all dogs. In the following sections, I offer up both sides of the debate and let you make up your own mind.

## The pros

One of the advantages of designer dogs is the sheer number of varieties available. Over 200 different hybrid combinations exist, which means there is a designer dog for every taste. Most of these hybrids are small and designed to have good personality combined with adorability.

Designer dogs are created to fit every need — from pocket-size dogs for easy travel to low-shed dogs for those with allergies. Many of these designer-dog creations are free of some of the traits that can make life difficult for the purebred dog. For example, some purebreds, like the Pug, have a very short snout, making breathing difficult. But the popular Puggle — the hybrid of a Pug and a Beagle — has a longer nose while still maintaining the Pug's wrinkled forehead and loopy gait.

Many hybrid breeders claim their dogs have *hybrid vigor*, a strength that comes from having parents of two different breeds. The offspring of two different breeds rarely inherit genetic defects, because the bloodlines aren't as close as those of purebreds. Purebred dogs often have inherited traits that can cause genetic defects. For example, many retriever breeds tend to have cataracts or epilepsy, many large-breed dogs have hip dysplasia, and many small-breed dogs are prone to dental problems. Mixed-breed dogs rarely inherit these genetic defects, because their genetics are more varied. (Incidentally, this is true of all mixed-breed dogs, not just designer dogs or hybrids.)

## The cons

The major con of designer dogs is the price. Most designer dogs cost upwards of \$1,500, whereas many purebred dogs begin at \$800.

Although each designer dog was bred for specific appearance and traits, there's a good chance that some or all of them will not develop in the offspring. Mixing breeds is chancy, because the outcome is not absolute. Although purebred dog offspring will always mature to appear like the parent dogs, the hybrid offspring may appear more like one parent than the other, or have a personality more like one parent than the other. So, although you might be searching for a small Yorkipoo,

the pup might grow up to be the size of a large Yorkshire Terrier instead of a Teacup Poodle.

As much as the breeders of designer dogs claim that mixing two breeds improves the offspring's overall health, that fact is debatable. Although many of the puppies don't show symptoms of the recessive genetic dysfunctions commonly seen in purebred dogs, many other puppies do. In fact, a hybrid puppy can have the poor luck to inherit the worst physical and temperament traits of both parents.



REMEMBER

There are no guarantees when you get a dog — purebred, hybrid, or mutt.

## The Major “Labels” in the Designer-Dog World

In the following sections, I introduce you to some of the most popular designer dogs.



TIP

I can't cover all 200+ varieties of designer dogs in this chapter. But if you're curious about the wide variety of designer dogs available, a great resource is the American Canine Hybrid Club ([www.achclub.com](http://www.achclub.com)). Click the Breeds tab to see a list of all the breeds the club recognizes.

### Ooodles of Poodles

Few hybrids are more popular than those with a Poodle parent. In fact, it was the Poodle mixture that started the entire fad of designer dogs, beginning with the Labradoodle and Cockapoo.

Poodles bring many great attributes into the hybrid crossing, plus they come in four sizes: Standard, Miniature, Toy, and Teacup (a size not currently recognized by the AKC). Plus, they're low- to no-shed dogs with dirt-resistant coats. When combined with a Retriever, or other straight soft-coated breed, they can produce a beautiful wavy or large-curl coat that's very attractive.

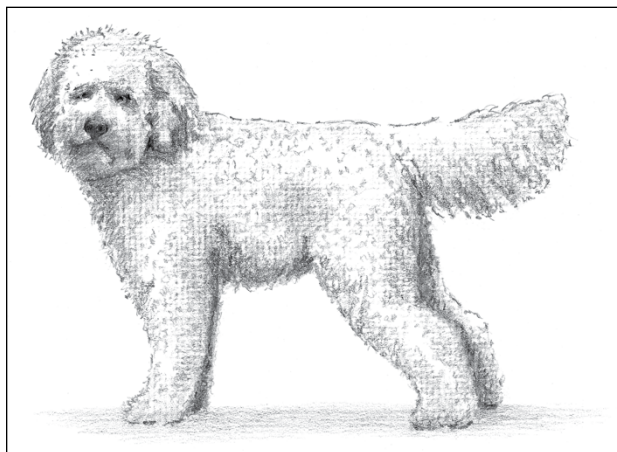
The smaller Poodle breeds also tend to live a long time. So instead of having a dog for only 10 to 12 years, you'll have one who will live upwards of 15 years. That, alone, makes a Poodle mix very attractive.

When compared to other purebred dogs, Poodles are rated high on the intelligence scale. They learn quickly and can work their way through problems faster than most other breeds. What's not to like about fast housetraining? Poodles are sensitive, highly aware, and learn by watching others.

Unless very poorly bred, Poodles have few genetic defects, though they aren't totally without health concerns. Their hips are far better than most retriever and shepherd breeds. They aren't prone to heart problems seen in many types of dogs. And they rarely have epilepsy, retinal atrophy, or allergies. Overall, mixing any purebred dog with a Poodle will create great offspring.

## Labradoodles (Labrador Retriever/Poodle)

Created as the ultimate service dog, Labradoodles (see Figure 2-1) quickly became popular around the world. Just as the Labrador Retriever is the most popular purebred dog in the United States, the Labradoodle is also the most popular, large designer dog.



**FIGURE 2-1:**  
Labradoodles  
have three coat  
types, two of  
which do shed.

*Illustration by Barbara Frake*

Initially, Labradoodles were bred to aid people who needed service dogs, but were allergic to dog dander and fur. Labradoodles are large, solid, strong, and intelligent. They're eager to learn and love to please their human companions. As with the purebred Labrador service dogs, Labradoodles can work all day without tiring. And they're very loving. Labradoodles are ideal with children.



**WARNING**

Labradoodles don't interact well with assertive people or dominant dogs. Any heavy-handed training technique, such as being yelled at or jerked around on a leash, will cause a Labradoodle to shut down and want to crawl into a corner.