

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

# Chihuahuas

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



Choose your ideal  
Chihuahua companion

Train your dog and prevent  
behavior problems

Keep your Chihuahua  
happy and healthy

**Kim Campbell Thornton**

Went to the dogs 30 years ago and  
still writing about them today

**Jacqueline O'Neil**





# Chihuahuas

3rd Edition

**by Kim Campbell Thornton and  
Jacqueline O'Neil**

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

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# Introduction

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Today you can't turn on the TV or browse in a gift shop without seeing Chihuahuas. From fashion centers to flea markets, they've become one of the nation's most popular pets. But just because these critters attract attention with their incredible cuteness isn't enough reason to run out and get one. You wouldn't ask the prettiest cheerleader or the best football player to marry you when you don't even know their name, would you? That's why we wrote this book: to introduce you to the charming, adorable Chihuahua breed. Whether you're a potential new owner or have enjoyed the companionship of Chihuahuas for years, this book can help you and your dog make the most of your relationship.

## About This Book

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*Chihuahuas For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is designed to be a complete reference guide. In it, we tell you everything you need to know about selecting, raising, and training a healthy, well-mannered Chihuahua. And although we promote prevention — not only in health matters but also by proposing positive training methods right from the start — we explain how to deal with problem behaviors your dog may have already picked up.

But wait. Maybe you don't have a dog yet and you're reading this book because you wonder if a Chihuahua is the breed for you. Well, you've come to the right place! This book covers the unique Chihuahua personality and gives honest answers about both the pleasures and problems of living with a Chihuahua. Ohmygosh! What if you read those sections and then decide a Chihuahua isn't your dream dog after all? In that case, we just saved you a bundle of money and years of enduring a match that wasn't

made in heaven. It's important to think about how *your* personality will blend with the unique disposition of this diminutive breed.

We wrote this book to make living with a Chihuahua easy and fun. Whether you have one Chi or half a dozen, this book simplifies daily care, explains how to train your dog in a kind and positive manner, and helps you recognize health problems, feed your dog appropriately, and have fun together.

## Conventions Used in This Book

To make this book even easier to understand, we've included a few conventions:

- » *Italic* text indicates new words or terms that we define, or for emphasis.
- » **Boldfaced** type helps you remember the most important points when reading bulleted lists or numbered steps.
- » We use monofont to set apart websites and e-mail addresses.
- » Occasionally, we write "Chi" instead of spelling out "Chihuahua." We do this to make for faster reading, not because it's a nickname for the breed. It isn't.

Because Jackie's degree is in English and Kim's is in journalism, we know that the accepted way to refer to an animal is "it," but neither of us can stand "it" when talking about a member of a family. So, we get around this by using gendered (he/she) or gender-neutral (they) language. We use "they" as a singular and a plural pronoun, usage that actually dates to the 14th century and earlier, so no lectures about how it's incorrect. It's not. And occasionally, we'll refer to specific Chihuahuas, like Jackie's chi, Manchita, or Kim's chi, Gemma.



# Foolish Assumptions

Before writing this book, we had to think about who we were writing it for, so we made some assumptions about you, dear reader, and the type of book you need. Here they are — are we close?

- » You like dogs in general, and the Chihuahua is one of the breeds you like in particular. You're thinking about making one a part of your family. But first you want to know more about the breed, the pros and cons of living with a Chihuahua, and how to select your ideal dog.
- » You've already taken the plunge. Your Chihuahua puppy is coming home soon and you want to know what they need right away and how to take care of them.
- » Your Chihuahua puppy is home, but doggone it, they wake you up during the night and can't seem to get the hang of housetraining.
- » Your Chihuahua is an adult. You want to read this book in your comfy recliner, but that darn dog claimed it. Lately, your chi growls and nips whenever anyone tries to sit in it. And don't even think about touching their food dish!
- » Your Chihuahua is well behaved and super smart. Everyone agrees that they're special, and now you want your dog to try obedience, agility, or maybe a dog show. Or perhaps you're considering training them to be a therapy dog.
- » You don't have and don't want a Chihuahua, but your cousin just got one and her birthday is coming up!

## Icons Used in This Book

The pages of this book are peppered with icons in the margins. Besides adding a little salsa, they also give you a quick bite of Chihuahua information. Here's what's on the menu:



TIP

You'll see this icon quite often. It contains advice on Chihuahua care and training techniques and provides shortcuts to simplify life with a dog.



REMEMBER

There are certain tidbits of information we'd like you to keep in your memory bank for the duration of your time as a Chihuahua owner. This icon highlights this information.



WARNING

Whoa! This Chihuahua is on full alert. This information helps you to keep from skidding into common but potentially serious mistakes.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

Every species has its own language and characteristics. These icons define the terms that dog owners in general, and Chihuahua owners in particular, need to know. You also find some interesting dog lore and some fun trivia.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading now, this product comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for interesting information on what to expect from Chihuahuas, what to buy for them, signs of a healthy Chihuahua, and a schedule of routine care. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for "Chihuahuas For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the search box.

## Where to Go from Here

Don't you just hate it when you pick up a book that you're sure has the information you need but it doesn't give you a clue where to find it? Well, we won't do that to you. This book is organized for your convenience — whether you want to “read all about it” or simply find a trick you can teach your Chihuahua to do so they can show off when Aunt Amelia visits.

You can start wherever you want to and easily find the information you need. Do you want to know how to raise an outgoing, social Chihuahua? Turn to Chapter 9. Are you concerned about house training? Chapter 10 will help you handle that. Are you Chihuahua shopping? Chapter 4 will help you find a good breeder.

If you're still wondering if a Chihuahua (or any dog) is right for you, read Chapters 1 and 3. They tell you what you need to know about dog ownership in general and living with a Chihuahua in particular.

There's no need to read this book from cover to cover unless you want to. Flip through it at will. Let the table of contents and the index guide you quickly to the info you need. Happy reading!



# 1

**Is a  
Chihuahua  
Your Canine  
Compadre?**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Consider the ups and downs of living with a little dog.

Find out all you ever wanted to know about the Chihuahua's distinctive personality and body structure.

Decide whether a Chihuahua is right for you and your lifestyle.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Examining your motives for acquiring a Chihuahua
- » Caring for a Chihuahua
- » Viewing the Chihuahua as a Toy breed
- » Making a match with a Chihuahua

## Chapter **1**

# Sharing Your Digs with a Dog: A Big Decision

**C**an money ever buy you love? Sure. Just use it to buy a Chihuahua. Your Chihuahua won't waffle about making a permanent commitment to you. In fact, expect your Chi to envelop you in affection, do their best to protect you, and maybe even improve your health. No kidding! Scientific studies show that a pet's companionship alleviates stress and helps people relax. In many cases, dogs (and other pets) get credit for lowering their owners' blood pressure. However, although most Chihuahua owners are crazy about their pets, a few wish they had never brought a dog (or *that* dog) home.

We don't want Chihuahua ownership to disappoint you, so in this chapter, we talk about the ups and downs of living with dogs in general, and Chis in particular. Is this portable pet with the king-size heart the right breed for you? In this chapter, you find the answer.

# Deciding if and Why You Want a Dog

If you are *dog-deprived*, you know it. You greet all your friends' dogs by name, eye every dog you see on the street, and sometimes even ask strangers if you can pet their pups. Maybe you surf through your favorite breeds on the internet or browse through the dog magazines at the bookstore. Do you have a list of possible puppy names in your head? You're already a *dog-goner*. It won't be long before other dog-deprived people are asking to pet your new puppy.

Ideally, you're drawn to dogs, and playing with them makes you feel good. But your reason for buying a dog may be less than ideal. For example, maybe you're lonely or bored, and you hope a dog can fill the void. The truth is, a little fur wrapped around a pleasant personality (like the dog named Manchita in Figure 1-1) spices up a bland life if you let it. Being loved by a dog is fulfilling in itself, and you can take it a step further and become involved in dog activities (see Chapter 12) that can bring you excitement, new friends, and a sense of purpose. So what's the problem? The glitch is that dogs purchased to relieve monotony often are ignored when the novelty wears off.



REMEMBER

Before buying a Chihuahua, you must decide if you'll always appreciate your pet or if you just crave some instant entertainment. Still not sure? Ask yourself this: "Am I ready to love a dog for the duration (possibly 15 or more years for a Chihuahua), or will a cruise to the Caribbean be just as effective for banishing my boredom?"

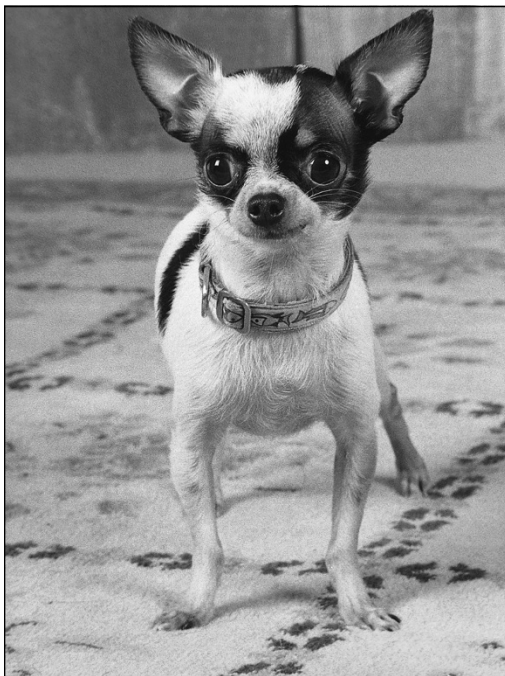
Getting a dog is a big decision. After all, dogs are dependent, make demands on your time, cost money, and inhibit your freedom. Is your pet worth it? Absolutely. That's why there are more than 83 million pet dogs in the United States. But just because dogs and people have been best buddies through the ages does not necessarily mean you need to run out and get a puppy right away. Maybe the Chihuahua life isn't right for you; maybe it is right for you, but not right now. Hopefully, you'll find out by taking a look at what living with a Chihuahua entails and the matchmaking tips in the following sections.





TECHNICAL  
STUFF

Chihuahuas are either smooth or long coated. Smooths have short hair that's soft and shiny (see Figure 1-1). Long coats have (you guessed it) long hair that may be straight or wavy (see Chapter 3 for more).



**FIGURE 1-1:**  
This Chi  
(named  
Manchita) is  
a smooth-  
coated  
Chihuahua.

## Doggy Dependents Aren't Tax Deductible: Chi-Care Duties

Like a child, a Chihuahua relies on you for food, housing, education, affection, toys, and veterinary care — and the IRS won't even let you declare your pet. Unlike a child, your puppy won't ever become independent. Your Chi won't fix their own dinner, brush their own hair and teeth, or pay their own vet bills. Instead, they'll depend on you for their health and happiness all their life.

Fortunately, most dog owners enjoy the small chores that make up daily dog care. For some, interacting with their dogs is a restful transition from a too-busy day. Others say that their dogs keep the nest from feeling empty and add laughter to their lives. And when you have a doggy dependent, you're always the most important thing in their life. They need you from puppyhood through old age. They don't graduate, get a job, marry, or move halfway across the country.

You should discuss division of labor with your family before getting a dog, but don't expect even the most logical schedule to be carved in stone. In the end, someone — one person — must take responsibility, making sure your Chihuahua is fed, watered, groomed, trained, exercised, and taken outdoors when they indicate a need to eliminate. Because you're the one reading this book, I bet that someone is you. Will you relish or resent the responsibility?

## Considering the long-term cost

Can you afford a dog? We're talking not only about the price of the dog (which can range from \$1,000 to \$2,500 or more for a Chihuahua puppy), but also the price of upkeep.

Some breeds — Chihuahuas, for example — don't eat much, but they still need the following:

- » *Quality* food (see Chapter 6)
- » Puppy shots, an annual checkup, and vaccinations and deworming as needed (see Part IV)
- » Minor surgery to spay or neuter (see Chapter 13), and potentially, removal of retained baby teeth, a procedure that is often performed at the same time as spay/neuter surgery
- » Medication to prevent heartworm, fleas, ticks, and other parasites (see Chapter 14)
- » A crate, grooming equipment, a collar and leash, dog dishes, and a variety of toys and treats (see Chapter 5)

And although Chis tend to be healthy, yours may rack up a big bill if they're ever in an accident and require emergency surgery or a week in a veterinary ICU. (Purchasing pet health insurance when they're a pup can help ensure you can cover such costs without a qualm.)

If all of those things fit your budget, lifestyle, and personality, then you are absolutely ready for and can afford a Chihuahua. Let's take a look at what you can expect.

## Placing your Chi in your daily schedule

So you're doing fine financially, but maybe you're working crazy hours to reach the next rung up the corporate ladder. In that case, your Chihuahua's excited antics when you come through the door can be just the ticket to turn your mood from office mania to bemused tranquility. Forget fuming over a frustrating meeting. Your dog needs to be walked and fed, and both of you will look forward to snuggling through a sitcom or two. Just keep in mind that no matter how frazzled you are, and no matter how late it is, your dog still needs your attention and affection. If you and your Chi live alone, especially, you're their entire world.

Chapter 5 and the chapters of Part 3 deal with setting up a schedule for your Chi and socializing and training your little buddy.



TIP

Some offices allow employees to bring well-behaved pets to work. Jackie's Chihuahua spent many hours in the office when she worked for the American Kennel Club (AKC) in New York City. Sure, that's a special case, but while they walked to work, they saw plenty of other pooches accompanying people carrying briefcases. Dogs in the office are even more common these days.

## Fitting your Chi into your family's future

Your spouse's feelings about having a dog, your kids' ages, your activity level, and your travel plans are important considerations

when deciding whether to make a Chihuahua part of your family. Bringing home a dog when your spouse doesn't want one or you're always busy with the kids is unfair to everyone. So is buying a breed your other half hates. In some cases a reluctant spouse grows to love the dog, but often one partner never quite comes around. Having to defend your dog on a daily basis gets old fast, and you don't need that. Furthermore, no dog deserves to be dumped at the pound because everyone got tired of the hassles at home.

Are you hoping to settle down and start a family in the near (or distant) future? Some breeds (Chihuahuas are one of them) are long lived, so with luck, you can plan on your dog being with you for your wedding and the births of your babies. But as sweet as that sounds, it may not be a good thing. Will your spouse also love your dog, or will they consider your Chi excess baggage?



WARNING

Another potential problem is that some breeds (Chihuahuas included) don't thrive around toddlers. It's a no-fault, lose-lose situation. While tiny dogs such as Chihuahuas are referred to as Toy breeds, they are living beings who aren't made for rough play. Chihuahuas are too delicate to be safe in the hands of young children, whose motor skills are still developing, so they're not suited to homes with kids under the ages of six or seven. Imagine how long your poor Chihuahua puppy would last if a toddler tripped over them or swung them by one leg like a stuffed teddy.

## Picking up after your Chi



REMEMBER

When you live with pets, you are responsible for their well-being. That means you have to maintain a safe, healthy environment.

Before you commit to caring for another living being, consider how you do on your own. For example, what kind of housekeeper are you? Is your home casual and relaxed — the kind of place where friends gather to munch popcorn and stream movies? Or is your house so immaculate that family members remove their shoes before stepping on the cream-colored carpet? If any of this sounds like you, throwing a dog into the mix might not be the best idea (unless you are willing to change your habits.)

Puppies aren't perfect. Chances are you'll have to clean up some accidents while housetraining your Chihuahua. Not only that, but they'll shed at intervals (or constantly) all their life (see Chapter 7). Long after they're reliably housetrained — maybe years after you've moved into your dream home — they can get sick and upchuck on the new sofa. When that happens, will you view the mess as a minor annoyance or a major tragedy? (The chapters of Part 3 deal with socializing and training your little buddy.)



WARNING

Even though a Chi's poops are small, they can make a big mess on the bottom of someone's shoe. Don't forget to clean up after your dog every time you walk them (see Chapter 8). In many places, it's the law!

## Viewing the Chihuahua as a Toy Breed

Let's say that after reading about the ups and downs of dog ownership, you decide that you want a canine companion. Right on! You're going to love living with a dog — that is, if your dog lives up to your expectations. Dogs are capable of doing an extraordinary number of things, but they are specialists in a sense, and no one breed does it all. A wrong match between dog and owner usually brings misery, like a bad marriage, while a good match means years of satisfaction and fun.

Some Toy dogs, such as the Toy Poodle, are downsized versions of their larger cousins. Others, like the Miniature Pinscher, have been around longer than the larger dogs that resemble them. Chihuahuas aren't a scaled-down version of any breed. They are a true Toy dog, developed solely to be companions to people. The following sections give you more details on this breed (for more, head to Chapters 2 and 3).

## What's terrific about Toys

What do all the Toy breeds have in common? They're living proof that great things really do come in small packages. Here's the upside of a Toy dog:

- » **Toy dogs are small.** They fit anywhere and can get enough exercise in a small apartment if that's where you live.
- » **Toy dogs are cuddly and love human attention.** They form extremely strong bonds with their people, and many are content to warm a lap for hours.
- » **Toy dogs are portable.** They're ideal for people who travel a lot and like to take their dogs along with them.
- » **Toy dogs love to show off.** Most of them enjoy learning new things when they're taught with positive-reinforcement techniques.
- » **Toy dogs often are welcome where larger breeds are not.** For example, some condo associations limit the size of pets.
- » **Toys are real dogs.** They're intelligent and affectionate, with bold, fun-loving temperaments. Many of them make alert watchdogs.

## TOY BREEDS ON PARADE

The American Kennel Club (AKC) currently recognizes 197 dog breeds and divides them into 7 groups, depending on the function each breed originally performed. The Chihuahua is a member of the Toy Group — a collection of small companion dogs. The AKC recognizes the following Toy breeds:

- Affenpinscher
- Biewer Terrier
- Brussels Griffon
- Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
- Chihuahua (smooth or long coat)