

Love at any age: The joys of adopting a senior animal companion

BY BECKY OWSTON

White-muzzled and lumpy, the senior mutt with the strangely shaped head arrived at Sanctuary One in spring 2012 after languishing in a shelter in Crescent City, California. While he was friendly and mild-mannered, it seemed unlikely that this older, unusual-looking lab mix stood much chance of being adopted.



Tom Miller and friend Leo.

Leo, named for his tawny coat and regal demeanor, was quick to settle into the routine at the farm. As “granddad” of the dog pack, he was content to snooze in the sun, calmly tolerating the antics of the younger canines—and keeping them in line when necessary. He was the consummate gentleman with volunteers and visiting school kids, and was a much-loved walking companion. Even the ground squirrels residing near the trail knew they had nothing—or at least little—to fear when the old dog approached.

After ten months, Leo finally found a loving home with a local family. Says his guardian Tom Miller, “We’ve fallen head over heels in love with Leo. My wife Pat and I have adopted a number of senior dogs over the years, and while it’s sad when you know you won’t have them for 10 or 12 years, the old ones just seem to understand that someone finally wants them. Leo has a degenerative disease that affects his chewing and swallowing muscles. He’s also covered with scars from what was obviously a pretty rough life in the past. But for some reason, even after the hard life he’s had, he’s patient and gentle. In short, he’s a great dog and we really enjoy his company. I hope someone reading this will consider adopting an older animal. The rewards are tremendous.”

Sadly, in shelters across the country, senior animals typically wait much longer for new homes than their more youthful counterparts. Of course, adorable kittens and puppies are hard to resist. But seniors need love, too—and they’ve got lots to give in return! They’ve settled into their personalities (and size) so you know exactly what you’re getting. They’re usually house-trained and know basic commands. They’re much less likely to devour your shoes or destroy your furniture, and they know what it takes to get along with others.

Sanctuary One volunteer Mardra Hord has felt the senior love ever since she and her husband Jason adopted Tito, an older Chihuahua (and Sanctuary One alum), last winter. “We’ve had to get real about our limitations when it comes to dogs,” she explains. “Since we don’t have the energy levels that a puppy would need, we were specifically looking for an older dog. Older animals are calmer, seem to listen better and have a more centered sense of ‘self.’ And I think they adapt easier.”

As most guardians of older animals have experienced, Mardra and Jason were pleased by how quickly Tito fit into his new household. “He has blended in effortlessly and treated our other pets with respect,” says Mardra. “We haven’t had to expend a lot of energy to train and work with him—he was just right there on everything. It seems like someone else put in the training, and all we have to do is use it. We haven’t regretted bringing him home. Not once.”

Because helping senior animals is one of our primary goals, we’re especially gratified to know that these adoptions have enriched the lives of Leo, Tito and their loving guardians. Knowing that their time together will be shorter and vet bills may be higher, it takes a special person to adopt a senior animal. If you’ve been considering adopting, we hope you’ll consider welcoming an older companion into your life!

For more information, call 541-899-8627, visit www.SanctuaryOne.org or email info@sanctuaryone.org.

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The Top Hat corn story

BY JONATHAN SPERO

Nearly all of the improved varieties of sweet corn in the last half century or more have been bred as hybrids. Open-pollinated (OP) varieties, from which one can save seed, are way behind. Fortunately, this should not be too hard to remedy.

One of the simplest methods to create a more modern OP variety is to choose a good hybrid and “de-hybridize” it. This is done by growing the seed, then saving and replanting only the best for several generations until it is reasonably stable.

In 2002 I planted rows of 16 commercial hybrid sweet corn varieties just to pick the best one. I chose Tuxedo. It was the first to germinate and it grew ears with a long husk cover that provides some protection from insect damage. It held up pretty well under weed pressure and produced a fairly consistent two ears per plant.

The next year I grew a field of Tuxedo, saving 300 or more nice ears for seed. The following year we planted those seeds. “Top Hat” corn is 2013 seed from the sixth generation of Tuxedo.

Tuxedo is supposed to uniformly possess the sugary enhancer (*se*) gene, so I did not expect lack of sweetness to be an issue. I found, however, in the third-generation hybrid, that many of the samples weren’t all that sweet. So began the search for sweetness.

I selected only from plants with two good ears. I tasted the secondary ears and marked for keeping only the primary ears from the sweeter plants, about half of the population. This should increase sweetness in subsequent generations, but it could be a slow process.

Oregon plant breeder Carol Deppe, PhD, first told me that an individual sweet corn kernel that has more sugar will begin to wrinkle more slowly as it starts to dry sown. Alan Kapuler, PhD, also an Oregon plant breeder and a former Applegate Valley resident, said he had made use of this principle. John Juvik, PhD, professor of plant genetics at the University of Illinois, explained why it works: increased sugar causes greater osmotic potential or pressure from inside the kernel, causing it to resist the onset of wrinkling. If some



kernels on the ear are sweeter than others, would I be able to pick those out and get more quickly to uniformly sweet corn? I decided to find out.

I had tasted the secondary ear on each stalk when the corn was ripe, and flagged the primary ear of the sweeter ones left on the stalk. I harvested these chosen and flagged ears about two weeks past prime eating stage, before fully mature for seed. I husked the corn and placed the ears up so they were exposed to air. After a few hours or days, kernels would begin to wrinkle. Some kernels begin to wrinkle, some faster than others. When some, but not all, had started to wrinkle, I used a felt marker to paint those not yet wrinkled. I then put the entire ear up to dry and picked out the painted kernels. Only those painted kernels were used to grow the next generation.

This process was repeated for two more generations, with sweeter ears chosen by taste and slowest-to-wrinkle kernels saved from those ears. In 2013 I grew corn from these twice-selected kernels, the sixth generation from the hybrid Tuxedo.

Special thanks is extended to the Clif Bar Foundation, Seed Matters and the Organic Farming Research Foundation for funding the sweetness and kernel selection in Top Hat corn.

Special thanks also goes to John A. Juvik, PhD; James Myers, PhD; John Navazio, PhD; Alan Kapuler, PhD; and to Jared Zystro for providing advice and technical assistance on this project.

How well did all this work? How does Top Hat (OP) compare with today’s (first-generation hybrid) sweet corn? It is time to find out.

A limited number of Top Hat corn samples is available to seed companies for trials now, and Top Hat corn seed should be available for sale this coming fall.

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