

How to Choose the 'Right' Dog Breeder

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Buying from a breeder typically means you have decided to purchase a specific dog breed – a purebred. If you are starting out without a particular breeder in mind, lists of breeders by individual breeds can be found in dog magazines, on the internet, in newspaper want ads, telephone books, veterinary clinics, grooming parlors, hunt clubs, breeder directories, etc. Perhaps the best method of selecting a breeder, however, is through referrals from friends, your veterinarian, or other acquaintances.

All dog breeders are not alike

Dog breeders, just like dog breeds, come in all varieties. At the high end of the spectrum, top quality breeders work hard to accentuate lines with good genetic traits. They will not breed dogs they know have 'bad' genetic characteristics, such as hip dysplasia.

Many quality breeders care little about the money earned, but honestly strive to continually produce puppies that conform to a higher standard as to their abilities, behavior, and physical attributes. This group we refer to as highly ethical breeders. If you could always determine who they were, this is where your new dog would come from.

Some full-time breeders, on the other hand, have made a good financial living out of breeding as many puppies as they could possibly sell with little regard to the potential problems they were passing on to the new owner. Some are the large-scale 'puppy mills,' where several animals of the same breed are placed in a single enclosure and no one even knows which dogs are the parents of a particular litter. In actuality, they do not care. They just want to churn out as many puppies as possible. These are the people that you need to avoid.

Some place in between these two extremes falls an intermediate group of breeders. Most of these only occasionally breed a litter and do so for a variety of reasons.

Some believe that they have a great dog and want one of its pups. There is nothing wrong with that logic. Most of these people want the best for the puppies they produce and will work hard to find them a good home.

Others are not very selective about choosing the prospective parents, but rather use any breeding partner available. Any dog with papers will do. Neither are they very particular where the puppies will go. They produce the litter solely to make money and they usually fail both in producing good puppies and making money. (For most of these individuals, raising a single litter typically produces many more expenses than most people ever realize. There will be food and veterinary bills, and the time spent working with and cleaning up after a litter of puppies could be more profitably spent in most part time jobs.)

Questions to ask dog breeders

The following list of questions were provided to us by breeders and Rescue/Adoption agencies to help you in your quest for the best breeder for your needs. The list is not all-inclusive, nor is every question necessarily appropriate for every breed. You may give more importance to some questions, and for some you may need to do further research to know what you would expect for an answer. The questions are listed here as a guide to help you get to know the person you may be getting your puppy from and the practices they follow as a breeder.

- Are you a member of the Breed Parent Club, and do you follow the Parent Club Code of Ethics? Do you have a copy of the Code of Ethics I could review?
- Do you belong to any breed clubs or breed organizations?
- How many different breeds of dogs do you breed? How many litters of each breed do you have in a year? And at what age do you breed your dogs?
- What are the known health problems with this breed, and what steps are you taking to minimize the chance of those problems occurring in your litters?
- What criteria (tests, accomplishments) do you require of your breeding stock, and why?
- Do you have test results (like OFA papers for testing hips) on both parents that I could review?
- What requirements must a puppy buyer meet to receive one of your puppies?
- Do you require a contract? If so, what are the terms and guarantees? What does your contract say about hereditary



problems?, type of registration (limited or full)?, about spaying and neutering?

- Do you take your dogs back at any time in their lifetime if a pet owner decides he or she no longer wants the dog?
- At what age do you place the puppies in their new home and will the puppies have had their first set of vaccinations before placement?

The decision about a 'right' breeder is yours

There is no national registry that ranks breeders as to their ethics or the quality of puppies they produce. It is possible for you to get a truly great puppy from any one of them. Your chances are just much better, however, when you deal with a good reputable breeder.

The responsibility, therefore, lies on your shoulders to make a good decision. You have to do your homework, ask lots of questions, and invest the necessary time now, before you make this important decision.