

How to Tell if a Dog Breeder is Responsible and Reputable

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You've decided to get a puppy, and have started contacting breeders – how do you tell if breeder is really good, or someone looking to make some money (or worse yet, a puppy mill in training)? With so many breeds and so many breeders, how do you choose?

It can be difficult, but not impossible, to find the perfect breeder – they're out there! However, they're usually the ones who advertise the least, so you do have to look a little harder. Plus, you need to do your homework – once you have researched various breeds to discover the best one for you and your family, you will need to ask some important questions when you start interviewing breeders.

Interviewing?? Yes, interviewing – this is a pretty big decision, one that will be with you for the next 10-15 years or more. You'll want to be sure that you get a physically and behaviorally healthy pup, and the breeder's practices have a HUGE influence on the way the pups will develop. Poor breeding practices can result in physical and behavioral conditions that could cost you thousands of dollars in vet's bills as the dog ages, or cause the early demise of your beloved pet.

So what do you need to look for when checking out breeders? Here's a list of things that the very best breeders do to ensure a healthy, happy litter of pups – and why they're important to YOU.

A great breeder:

- Genetically tests both the stud and dam before breeding, and gladly shares the results of ALL testing with potential purchasers
- Researches the full pedigrees of both stud and dam, and does NOT breed if there's a high probability of health or behavior issues
- Does not breed a dog before the age of 2 or 3 years – there are many issues that do not show up until adolescence or later
- Does not breed any dog more than once every 2 or 3 years – it's far too much stress, physically, on the mother and while rare, studies are starting to show issues with males as well
- Doesn't have more than two litters on the ground at any given time – it's difficult to properly socialize too many puppies at once
- Encourages you (and your family) to visit your pup at least weekly before the pup goes home with you
- Doesn't let the pups leave the dam/litter before the age of 10-12 weeks – research by Scott and Fuller on the developmental stages of puppies proved that, while the period around 7-8 weeks is the best time for a pup to get used to humans, it's not the best time to leave the litter. Between 7-12 weeks is when a puppy is learning two VERY important things: how to communicate with other dogs and bite inhibition!
- Follows the "Puppy's Rule of 12's" when preparing pups for their new homes : http://www.uvhs.org/behavioral_docs/the_puppys_rules_of_twelve.pdf
- Insists on contract with the following conditions: spay/neuter on pet quality or prior breeding approval for show/field/work quality; pup/dog's return to breeder if, at ANY time in the dog's life, you can no longer care for it; health guarantee (usually part of return clause)
- Offers lifetime guidance and support for as long as you own the dog
- Is a member and follows the Code of Ethics of the parent (main) breed club

- Registers the litters with the AKC, CKC (Canadian, NOT Continental!) or UKC (United, NOT Universal!), WCAC or ARBA as well as major Health Registries (eyes, hips, etc)
- Shows, trials, or otherwise titles their dogs (this shows an investment in bettering the breed)
- Asks YOU for references, including a veterinarian
- Finds out as much about you, your family, your living situation and your intentions for the pup as possible – will NOT sell to 'just anyone'
- NEVER sells their pups to a pet store or outlet

Wait – you aren't done yet! There are some very important things to check when you go to visit the puppies:

- Are the puppies kept indoors with the family, or out in a kennel, garage or shed?
- Ask to see where the pups are kept – is it clean and comfortable, with appropriate (and enough!) toys for the pups? If their area is littered with urine/feces, you may be facing problems with parasites or worse; as well, you don't want them to be housed in stacked crates, for the same reason
- Meet the Parents! If possible, meet both, but definitely ask to meet Mom. A LOT of behavior issues are passed from the mother's side – both genetically AND emotionally. Is Mom calm, and friendly? Is she well-cared for, with healthy-looking fur, eyes, skin and teeth?
- Are the adults indoor or outdoor dogs? Ask to see their living area, if outdoors, and check for cleanliness, temperament, etc.

Seems like a lot to look for, doesn't it? Maybe not, when you think how important this new addition will become to your family!

One final note:

While these new 'designer breeds' are wicked cute, and have really cute names, too – they aren't necessarily any healthier than a very carefully bred pure-breed dog, or for that matter, any random-bred dog, either. And, they aren't REALLY a breed – they are TWO breeds that someone decided to 'mix' in order to sell. As such, their genetic health is as uncertain as any mixed-breed dog you can find at your local shelter – probably more so, because they only exist for the 'quick buck'. So, before you shell out thousands of dollars for the latest 'designer dog', remember this: the same mix is probably languishing in a shelter somewhere, and will be put down if no one adopts it. Wouldn't you rather save a life (as well as a thousand dollars)?