

HOW TO FIND A GOOD DOG BREEDER



So you've decided to get a dog. You're prepared to feed, exercise, train, clean up after, work through problems with, and love a dog every day for the next 10 to 20 years. You've evaluated your lifestyle and know exactly what sort of dog you're looking for (e.g., a high energy dog to go running with you or a more sedate dog to lounge on the couch with you), and you know that you need to seek desired characteristics in *individual* dogs, not just a breed, because breed is no guarantee of temperament or likes and dislikes.

Because you know that about one in every four dogs in U.S. animal shelters is purebred, you start there, because you want to do a great thing and help a homeless dog. You know that most dogs lose their homes because of "people reasons" like cost, lack of time, lifestyle changes (new baby, divorce, moving, or marriage), or allergies, and not because of something the dog has done. You've checked out the breed rescue group for your desired breed but still haven't found "The One." And you know better than to buy a puppy from a pet store or over the Internet because most of those puppies come from mass breeding facilities better known as *puppy mills*.

So you've decided to buy a dog from a breeder—but you don't want to support someone who doesn't have the dogs' best interests in mind.

How do you identify a compassionate breeder? First, know that good breeders don't breed to make money—they don't sell their puppies to the first person who shows up with cash in hand. Too often, people opt for convenience and quick purchase and buy a puppy from a pet store or over the Internet, thinking that they are dealing with a reputable business. Too often, the result of such practices includes puppies with poor health or temperament problems that may not be discovered until years later. Unfortunately, these new pet families often end up heartbroken, with dogs who have genetic health problems or who develop significant behavior problems due to a lack of early socialization. In some cases, these problems can cost thousands of dollars to treat.

So to avoid these pitfalls and choose a good breeder, look for one who *at a minimum*:

- Keeps dogs in the home as part of the family—*not* outside in kennel runs
- Only breeds one or two types of dogs and is knowledgeable about what are called "breed standards" (the desired characteristics of the breed, such as size, proportion, coat, color, and temperament)
- Doesn't always have puppies available but rather will keep a list of interested people for the next available litter
- Has dogs who appear happy and healthy and don't shy away from visitors
- Shows you where the dogs spend their time—in a clean, well-maintained area
- Encourages you to spend time with the puppy's parents—at a minimum, the pup's mother—when you visit
- Has a strong relationship with a local veterinarian and shows you individual records of veterinary visits for your puppy

- Explains in detail the potential genetic problems inherent in the breed (every breed has specific genetic predispositions) and provides documentation that the puppy's parents and grandparents have been tested to ensure that they are free of these genetic problems
- Offers guidance for caring for and training your puppy and is available for assistance after you take your puppy home
- Provides references from other families who have purchased puppies
- Feeds high quality "premium" brand pet food
- Is actively involved with local, state, and national clubs that specialize in the specific breed; good breeders may also compete the dogs in conformation trials (which judge how closely dogs match their "breed standard"), obedience trials (which judge how well dogs perform specific sets of tasks on command), or tracking and agility trials
- Encourages multiple visits and wants your entire family to meet the puppy
- Provides you with a written contract and health guarantee and allows plenty of time for you to read it thoroughly; the breeder should *not* require that you use a specific veterinarian

In addition to those criteria, you'll want a breeder who requires some things of you, too. The breeder should require you to:

- Explain why you want a dog
- Explain who in your family will be responsible for the pup's daily care, who will attend training classes, where the dog will spend most of his or her time, and what "rules" have been decided upon for the puppy—for example, whether or not the dog will be allowed on furniture
- Provide proof from your landlord or condominium board (if you rent or live in a condominium complex) that you are allowed to have a dog

- Provide a veterinary reference
- Sign a contract that you will spay or neuter the dog unless you will be actively involved in showing him or her (which applies to show-quality dogs only)
- Sign a contract stating that you will return the dog to the breeder should you be unable to keep the dog at *any* point in the dog's life

If the breeder you're working with doesn't meet all of these minimum criteria, The Humane Society of the United States advises you to walk away. Remember, your dog will likely live 10 to 20 years, so it's well worth investing some time now to be sure you're working with a reputable breeder who breeds healthy, happy dogs.

You can find reputable breeders by asking for referrals from your veterinarian or breed rescue group, contacting local breed clubs, or visiting dog shows. Remember, a reputable breeder will *never* sell dogs through a pet store or in any other way that doesn't allow interaction with buyers to ensure that the puppies are a good match for the families and that the buyers will provide responsible lifelong homes.

Please don't ever buy a dog without personally visiting where he or she was born and raised. Take the time now to find the right breeder, and you'll be thanking yourself for the rest of your dog's life.

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