

Bravo Dog Training

Selecting A Breeder



Finding a good breeder can be a challenging but worthwhile task. While many future dog owners want to select the best puppy from a wonderful breeder, knowing how to do that can be incredibly difficult. The following are important guidelines to help make the task a little easier.

Experience: A good breeder will have lots of experience with their particular breed of dog. Experience may be from owning, showing, training, breeding, etc. and should be years worth. The more experience the breeder has the more likely he or she is to make good decisions on selecting a mom and dad for the next litter of puppies. There are many factors that come into a breeding selection, including health, temperament, personality, and conformation. A breeder with experience will try to get the best of all these qualities, not just mate a purebred to purebred. A long time breeder should be actively involved with the breed. This could be through participation in breed rescue, conformation showing, or competitive sports such as obedience, agility, hunting, herding, etc.

Quality vs. Quantity: Be aware of too many puppies! Reputable breeders often only produce one or two litters a year, and sometimes less. Seriously question breeders that produce more than three litters a year, breed each time their female(s) come into heat, have multiple litters at one time (or puppies that are 2 months and 5 months and 6 months, etc...), offer puppies "always available," or have lots of breeds of dogs. These breeders are more likely to be in it for the money or just plain careless. A good breeder is aware that there are more dogs than homes in the world, and strives to produce small numbers of quality puppies. Mass production can also be a tip-off to a puppy mill situation (see pet store puppies).

Why are they breeding? With the number of dogs euthanised in shelters each year everyone should have a *very* good reason before breeding a litter of puppies. "She's purebred" is no longer good enough (25% of dogs in shelters are purebred). Every home that takes a puppy from a breeder is one that doesn't rescue a dog from a shelter, so breeding because "I found them all homes - everyone wants a puppy out of Princess!" doesn't hold up well either. Some dogs are bred for conformation, and others for working (some are even bred for both). The breeder should have a clear understanding of why the litter was bred and why the two parents were selected. The litter might be in an attempt to produce better quality show dogs, or to have puppies with excellent working instincts. Find out exactly why the litter was bred, and avoid breeders that have bred because "she has papers," "his dad was a Champion!" "she's such a friendly dog," "we wanted the money," "she needed to experience motherhood," etc. Also be wary of breeders that are breeding for rare colors. Not only is this just producing more dogs, but breeding for color only can result in a handful of serious genetic health problems.

"Papered" and "Purebred" dogs: Just because a dog (or its parents) is "purebred" does not make it a quality pet. Being purebred simply means that it's not a mutt. Some breeders try to puff up the words "purebred," "papered," or "Champion lines." One of the first things to check is if the parents are AKC registered. While this alone does not make the dog a quality one, it eliminates possible misrepresentation of what "papered" is. Some breeders use registries other than AKC, and depending on the breed this may be a big warning sign. Any purebred dog (whether from "Championship lines" or not) should be researched carefully. The best way to ensure that a dog is "quality" (regardless of why you want the dog) is to have someone with experience look over the puppy's pedigree. This can (and should) be done *before* you buy the puppy. Someone experienced with conformation showing or with the type of working dog (hunting dogs, herding dogs, etc.) can help you understand what the various certificates and titles mean.

Spay/Neuter Contracts: Ethical breeders will require that you have your puppy spayed or neutered. There will most likely be a written contract requiring that the dog is altered by a certain age, and sometimes breeders also require a deposit. Breeders that don't stress the importance of spaying and neutering may not be looking out for the welfare of their dogs and their breed.

Genetic Testing: Sadly, selective breeding has resulted in numerous genetic problems. Some are better understood than others, but many can now be tested for. Problems such as hip dysplasia, heart conditions, thyroid disease, hearing and eye problems can all be tested in the parents to help avoid passing them on to

future generations. While each breed is different, nearly all should be tested for one disorder or another. Find out what your breed is commonly tested for, and be sure you ask the breeder if they perform those tests before breeding. Make certain that you see the results of these tests. For instance, X-Rays done on hips should be sent in to the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals. Their website has a database you can search to find what ratings were given. Some tests such as the CERF test (checking for eye abnormalities) must be repeated once a year to remain valid. CERF results can also be searched for on the Web. Breeders not testing for genetic problems often are not properly educated, not serious about the health of the breed or worse, have something to hide.

Questions from the breeder: Just as you should have lots of questions to ask the breeder, the breeder should also be inquiring about you as a potential puppy owner. Be prepared for questions about your home, your yard, renting or owning property, your veterinarian, previous dogs you've owned, your experience and knowledge of the breed, why you want the dog, and much more! Good breeders will follow their puppies through their entire life and want to be certain that you are ready for the type of dog you are seeking. Lots of questions from the breeder isn't meant to insult you - it's meant to keep the puppies safe and ensure that you have all the resources you need to raise your new pet appropriately. Some breeders have you fill out an adoption questionnaire; others just slip questions into conversation. Good breeders often use this information to help match the right puppy for you. Be concerned about any breeder that isn't concerned about you!

Availability: As previously mentioned, responsible breeders are trying for quality, not quantity. Combined with a good reputation and years of experience, this often means you have to wait for a puppy. As hard as this is, it's a good thing! This is where so many people go wrong, aiming for the right now instead of the right dog. Waiting ensures you get the puppy that is perfect for you, and also gives you time to be sure that this is really the right breed for you. While you wait concentrate on everything you'll need once you have your puppy. Save money for vaccines, spaying or neutering and emergencies, as well as purchasing a crate, toys, etc. If this is your first dog in a while research veterinarians, trainers and groomers. Talk to other dog owners in the area to see what advice they have. Find out what the local laws are relating to dog ownership. Remember, anything worth having is worth waiting for. Breeders trying to get rid of puppies that are already 8 weeks old or that are advertising in the newspaper may not have the experience and reputation you desire, or may be breeding so many puppies that they can't find homes for them all.

Age of puppies: The generally accepted age to place puppies in their new homes is 8 weeks old. Puppies need lots of socialization from their littermates and

lessons can be lost if a puppy is removed too young. Dogs can develop problems that last a lifetime if taken away at a young age, such as dog aggression and fear aggression. A litter of puppies is a lot to handle, and unfortunately breeders sometimes cave in to selling puppies just after they are weaned, at 5 or 6 weeks old. Occasionally a breeder may have puppies that are older than 8 weeks, even several months old. This may or may not be a warning sign. Some responsible breeders will "grow out" a puppy to see if it will be a good show dog or working dog. In this case the puppy, which may have grown too tall for the show ring or didn't develop the proper attitude for working, might be placed in a home at 4 months or more. Sometimes, despite their best efforts, a home may have not worked out for a puppy that was initially sold at 8 weeks old. A good breeder will take the puppy back, and may then place the dog at an older age. These are normal reasons to see an older puppy available. Older puppies that are available because the breeder couldn't find them homes are something to be careful of.

Price: Because different breeds sell for a wide variety of prices it can be hard to put an exact number on any given puppy. The best advice is to be wary of prices too high and too low. Puppies priced low may be because the owner is trying to get rid of them quickly. Puppies priced too high can be the result of a owner who is breeding litters to make money rather than to improve the breed. Some prices soar when a breeder claims "Champion lines" or "Imported parents." While these can affect the price of a puppy, neither is a sole determinant of quality. Have someone with experience look at the pedigree to determine the merit of those claims. "Show Quality" and "Pet Quality" can also affect the price of a puppy. If you are getting a dog to show in conformation, you should probably expect to pay more. "Pet Quality" does not mean that anything is wrong with a dog, just that it has some features that won't allow it to do well at a dog show - it could be a little too tall, the wrong color, or hold its tail differently. Some breeds will naturally be more expensive, such as English Bulldogs because of the difficulty they have in breeding and whelping. Ask lots of different breeders to get an idea of an "average" price for the breed you have chosen.

Viewing Parents: Getting a chance to see the parents of your "puppy-to-be" can be an exciting and enlightening experience. Viewing the parents gives you a chance to check out several things - the condition and temperament of mom and dad, as well as the way the breeders care for their dogs. Spend some time looking around at the property, home or kennel where the dogs are kept. Are things clean, safe and under control? Would you want your dog to live in the same conditions? The way a breeder takes care of their dogs says a lot about how much pride they take in them. Also look at the number of dogs on the property. While many breeders have more dogs than the average person can comprehend living with, it should be a controllable number where the breeder knows each dog's name,

personality and quirks. Breeders that have dogs jammed into cages or pens and every available space or those that are kept in filthy conditions should be eliminated from your search. If you feel the dogs there need "saving" than call your local animal control or humane organization. Paying for a puppy to save it only encourages those breeders to continue. Breeders that won't allow you to view the parents or meet you in a parking lot probably have something to hide. Occasionally you may not be able to visit the breeder because of the distance involved. Make every effort to get there, but if you can't, find a friend who can or talk to veterinarians, trainers, groomers and the humane society where the breeder lives to find out what their experience has been. Breeders that you find over the Internet can be just like anything else over the Internet - some are legitimate and some are not. Pictures you view may or may not be of the dogs and property the breeder owns.

Pet Store Puppies: There is a long list of reasons to not buy a puppy from a pet store. On the top of the list is that all pet stores get their puppies either from puppy mills or backyard breeders looking to make a quick buck. These puppies can have serious health problems that may not be apparent to you until well after the "warranty period" expires. They lack crucial socialization at a young age. These puppies are also notoriously difficult to housebreak because they have been required to eliminate in the cage they eat, sleep and play in. Buying a puppy (or anything else) from a pet store that sells dogs and cats funds the horrid treatment animals receive in puppy mills.

Your next dog will be with you for a long time (on average over 14 years!), so take the time before you purchase him or her to become well informed. Create a list of questions and make sure they get answered in a way you understand. Be comfortable with the breeder you choose. The very best breeders remain a friend and resource for you and your dog for life.