

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 you're looking for (e.g., a high energy dog to go running with or a more sedate dog who will lounge next to you on the couch). You even know that it's best to seek these characteristics in individual dogs because breed alone is not a guarantee of temperament or likes and dislikes.

Since one in every four dogs in U.S. animal shelters is purebred, you start there hoping to do a good deed and help a homeless dog. Most of these animals lost their homes through no fault of their own, but because of "people reasons" such as cost, lack of time, allergies, or lifestyle changes that a new baby, divorce, moving, or marriage can bring. Yet, after looking around at shelters and breed rescue groups, you still haven't found "the one." And buying a puppy from a pet store or over the Internet is out of the question—most of those dogs are from mass breeding facilities known as puppy mills.

So you choose to buy a dog from a breeder who has proven to have the dogs' best interests at heart.

How do you identify a compassionate breeder? First, know that good breeders don't sell their puppies to the first person who shows up with cash in hand. Too often, people opt for convenience and a 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 end up heartbroken, with dogs who have genetic health problems or who develop significant behavior problems from a lack of early socialization. In some cases, these problems can cost thousands of dollars to treat.

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 the breeds
- Doesn't always have puppies available but keeps 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 one or more local veterinarians and shows you individual records of veterinary visits for your puppy
- Explains in detail the potential genetic problems inherent to the breed (every breed has a specific genetic predisposition) 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 the care and training of 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, obedience trials, 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, you'll want a breeder who requires 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 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 showing him or her (only applies to show-quality dogs)
- 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, walk away. Remember, a dog will likely live for 10 to 20 years, so it's well worth investing some time 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 groups, contacting local or national breed clubs, or visiting dog shows. Remember, a reputable breeder will *never* sell dogs through a pet store or in any other way that does not 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.

humanesociety.org/puppymills



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2100 L Street, NW Washington, DC 20037
humanesociety.org