



Questions to ask breeders (applicable to ANY breed):

Talk to, and try to visit several breeders if you can, so that you get a sense of what separates the really dedicated and responsible breeder from the rest. The right questions will help you choose from among many registered dog breeders, because they should be able to mentor you with helpful information and guide you as your puppy grows up.

Don't stop with just "How much?" Money should not be the most important consideration when choosing a dog. The health of the puppy and the breeder's support and ethics should be very high priorities. Ask the following questions of any breeder that you are considering working with — the answers you get should make you feel confident, and if any leave you worried, consider another breeder:

How long have you been involved with this breed? The ideal response is at least several years. But a first-time breeder may fit the bill if he or she can show that they are taking the right steps, or being mentored by more experienced breeders.

Ask how many litters they've bred and if they're a member any clubs or organizations associated with the breed (many clubs will have a code of ethics). Keep in mind that the length of time a breeder has been breeding dogs may not be the best indicator of how well they do things. Some first-time breeders can be extremely knowledgeable and more than capable of choosing a puppy that's a good match for you.

How many litters do you raise a year? A breeder with just one or two litters a year is more likely have the time to give them the care and handling they need, and to find them good homes. Each female dog should be bred no more than once a year unless a governing medical condition (e.g. pyometra) determines that the bitch must be bred on consecutive seasons.

The breeder should know the pedigree of their puppies by heart and have information about their ancestors. A good litter is the result of careful planning and research by the breeder to ensure the best traits of the breed are passed on to the puppies. If a breeder knows little more than a few dogs' names, it may be an indication of poor planning for the litter, or an opportunistic mating of the family pets.

If the breeder wants competition and show dogs or has a particular purpose in mind, like breeding working dogs, they've probably planned this litter thoroughly and taken the necessary steps to ensure the puppies are healthy and well socialized.

Are you involved with other dog breeds besides this one? A good breeder will usually only be involved with one or two different breeds, sometimes three. If you find a dog breeder dealing with more than three breeds, consider whether they're truly dedicated to raising quality dogs.

May I see the mother (dam) and photos of the father (sire) and other relatives? Meeting the sire may not be possible unless he is located in your area, but you should certainly try to meet the dam. A puppy's parents can give you better insight into its future personality than does its breed. The dogs and puppies should be relaxed around people. If the parent dogs and puppies seem comfortable with humans, that's a good sign that they've been properly cared for and socialized.

May I see where you raise the pups? The place should be clean. Don't worry about the dirty dishes in the sink - just make sure the dogs' living area is safe, sanitary, and that they're supplied with fresh water, beds, and toys. Is there a toilet area in the puppy's living quarters, or is it all one big toilet? Do the puppies have free access to outdoor/grassed area? (the first steps to house training your puppy)

What dog activities are you involved with? Good answers to this question include e.g., breed showing, obedience, agility or IPO. A good breeder is motivated by enthusiasm for the breed, not by making extra money.

Why do you breed? Any response that indicates the breeder wants to improve the breed is a good sign.

What is the lifespan and what are the potential health problems associated with this breed? Any dog breed can have tendencies toward health problems, and responsible breeders screen for these issues. Ask first what kind of potential problems are known in the given breed, and then what tests are done. Also ask about contractual guarantees for the health of the puppies. If the breeder protests there are no problems, or doesn't know about any in their lines, look for another breeder. Because some genetic conditions don't show up until adulthood, health clearances aren't available for dogs younger than two years old. For that reason, a responsible breeder won't breed dogs until they have been tested.

What inoculations and de-wormings do the puppies receive? The breeder should list the puppies' immunizations and de-worming procedures or explain why he/she adopts an alternative plan.

How do you socialize the puppies? Ideally, the breeder raises her puppies inside their home, so that they feel comfortable with a human household's sights, sounds and activities. If raised in a separate kennel, the puppies should have frequent contact with people of all ages.

How often are the puppies handled, and who by? Puppies should be handled by lots of different people beginning very early in life so they'll grow up to be comfortable and safe around humans. Ideally, the breeder throws regular "puppy parties", inviting lots of guests over to play with and handle the pups. This is particularly important if you're adopting a puppy older than 7-10 weeks. All the puppies in a litter should be handled individually on a regular basis and exposed to different people, situations, and environments.

Do you provide a health guarantee? The only acceptable answer to this question is "yes." Generally, breeders agree to replace a puppy found to have a serious health condition within a few days of purchase.

Do you provide a contract? Again, the only acceptable answer is "yes." The contract should outline spay-neuter requirements, provisions for returning the puppy to the breeder if necessary, and other aspects of the sale. If you are not going to breed your dog, the breeder should ask you to sign a contract promising to spay or neuter your puppy, to avoid contributing to pet overpopulation.

When can we take the puppy home? No reputable breeder allows a puppy to go to a new owner before 7 weeks of age. Playing with littermates teaches your puppy a lot about getting along with other dogs. A puppy that is taken away from their littermates too early is at a major disadvantage in developing their canine social skills.

How can we contact you after the sale? There are always new things to learn about puppies and purebred dogs. Even if you've had your particular breed before, having a mentor on your side is a great benefit. Ask if the breeder will be available to offer help and advice along the way. It's wonderful when a breeder stays in touch and helps with any questions.

Can I talk to someone who's bought a puppy from you? Unless it is an accidental breeding of family pets—which answers a previous question—this should not be the dog breeder's first litter. There should have been previous satisfied puppy owners. Good breeders should be happy to give you references; even better, they'll refer you to other breeders as well as customers. Take the time to contact all the references given and whether the breeder was available to assist them at all times.

What happens if I can no longer take care of my dog? A good breeder should take the dog back, at any stage of the dog's life, if you're unable to care for it. A really good breeder will insist on this. He or she wants to make sure the puppies that they brought into the world will always be taken care of.

Can I select my own puppy, or will you do this for me? Discuss what you expect from your puppy as he grows up. Do you want a dog to hike with you, play with the kids, compete, or sleep on your lap? The breeder should know which individual puppies are more laid back or "driven" than others. Ask if a temperament test been done as these tests help predict a puppy's adult personality and potential problems. They measure stability, shyness, aggressiveness, and friendliness. Once tested, puppies can be better matched with owners. NB: if the breeder doesn't feel that there is a puppy in the litter that fits your needs, you should thank them for being honest with you. It is hard to find a good home for a puppy and the breeder should be commended for making sure that happens, even if the home isn't yours.

Bottom line:

The breeder should be up-front about the breed's drawbacks, whether that means a tendency to develop certain health problems or a working temperament that's not for every owner. A good breeder wants you to love and care for your new dog for his entire lifetime, and he/she knows that's more likely if you're well prepared for the personality of the breed.

The breeder wants to meet the whole family and welcomes you to make several visits. To make the best match, the breeder will want to meet everyone who'll be living with the puppy. And they will want you to take the time to make the right decision; high-pressure salesmanship is a red flag.

The breeder should ask you lots of questions. This shows that he or she wants to know exactly what kind of home the puppies are going to. They may ask who's going to be home during the day, what your dog-owning history is, and why you're interested in the breed. Don't be defensive; they are just doing their job, which is taking care of the pups that they bring into the world.

Before buying a puppy, take the time to research and find a responsible breeder. Puppies from good breeders are more likely to grow up to be healthy, temperamentally sound dogs.