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Working with a reputable breeder

A Dozen Simple Ways to Be Certain You Are Working with a Reputable Breeder

By Nancy Kay DVM

So, you've decided to adopt a dog and feel certain that a purebred is your heart's desire. You've done your research to be sure that the size and temperament of the breed you've chosen is the right fit for you, your lifestyle, and everyone else who lives with you (including both two-legged and four-legged family members). Now, what's the best way to find this dog of your dreams?

Here are some good options for finding your new dog (hopefully, we are in agreement that pet store and site unseen online purchases are not good options – see <http://speakingforspot.com/blog/?p=710>). If you are open to adopting an adult dog, let the staff of your local shelter or humane society know what you are looking for – a surprising number of purebred dogs wind up there. I also encourage you to contact breed-specific rescue organizations (google the name of your breed along with the word “rescue”). Life's unforeseen circumstances (death, divorce, financial woes, etc.) cause many wonderful dogs to end up with rescue groups.

Another good option for finding your new dog is via a reputable breeder. (For the sake of your reading sanity and my writing sanity, throughout this article I refer to breeders with the feminine pronoun.) The word reputable is reserved for the breeder who is truly passionate about the breed she fancies. Not only does she possess knowledge about the breed's history, she knows everything there is to know about their inherited health issues (every single breed has them), temperament, and special needs. She is a wealth of information about breed ancestries (pedigrees) and the reading material on her nightstand likely includes breed-related magazines. Compare this description to what is referred to as the “backyard



breeder,” the individual who produces pups without giving significant thought to inherited diseases, pedigrees, conformation, performance, or temperament. Their reasons for breeding have nothing to do with preserving the integrity of the breed; perhaps they want their children to witness the “miracle of birth,” believe in the myth that healthy female dogs must have a litter, or are naïve enough to believe that producing pups is a money-making proposition.

Working with a reputable breeder provides the very best insurance policy that your new pup will have an ideal temperament and the genetic potential for a lifetime of good health. So, how do you go about finding a reputable breeder? I encourage you to attend some dog shows and local breed club functions to do some schmoozing. Take note of any consensus you perceive (positive or negative) about particular breeders. Pay an online visit to the American Kennel Club (if you reside in the United States) and/or the national breed-specific association (i.e., Golden Retriever Club of America). These sites contain referrals to breeders, but in no way guarantees that they are reputable – you still need to do your homework! Once you've created your “short list” of

puppy providers, use the list below of a dozen simple ways to be certain you are working with a reputable breeder.

1. A reputable breeder insists that you visit her home and all of her dogs. In addition to the puppies, she wants you to meet their mother and, if they are on site, the sire and other relatives (aunts, uncles, and cousins). She wants you to see that the dogs are not confined to a sterile kennel environment and that they have many opportunities for human interaction from an early age. Additionally, this visit provides the breeder with an opportunity to see how you interact with dogs.

2. A reputable breeder will want to show you all the paperwork pertaining to her pups' pedigree and health clearances (consult with the breed association to learn which medical issues are pertinent for your breed). Not only does she have this paperwork for your pup, but for the parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles as well. She will take great pride in this paperwork as it demonstrates her quest to enhance the breed and produce the very best puppies possible. She will be sending a copy of this paperwork home with you and your pup along with a binder full of other important documents: general information about the breed, breed related health issues, recommendations for obedience classes, grooming tips, results of temperament testing, vaccination and deworming history, record of veterinarian examination, photos of the relatives, and everything you need for American Kennel Club Registration (and you thought you were just getting a puppy!).

3. A reputable breeder will want to tell you about any significant health problems that have arisen in any of the dogs she has produced (no breeder is immune). Not only does this suggest integrity on her part, it also lets you to know that she has stayed in contact with her clients throughout the lifetime of the dogs she's placed.

4. A reputable breeder has more questions for you than you

have for her! You will likely be asked to fill out an application and provide references. She will request a description of your immediate family, other pets, prior dog experience, house and yard (she may want to come for a site visit), time spent at home versus work, amount of money you are willing to spend on veterinary care, and what activities you hope to share with your dog. If you feel as though you are being interrogated, it is because you are! The reputable breeder is looking for a single permanent relationship for her pup; she will readily decline a new home that she feels is less than ideal. Keep in mind, she is well versed in her breed's best and worst qualities, and knows that these traits are not well suited to every individual and household. By the way, you will not be allowed to choose a puppy from the entire litter. The reputable breeder rarely produces more than two or three litters a year and most of the pups will be spoken for well in advance. If she does not have a pup that is right for you, she will gladly refer you to another reputable breeder.

5. A reputable breeder is in no hurry to send her puppies off to their new homes. They may even be held a few weeks longer than the traditional six to eight weeks of age during which time she continues to evaluate each pup to determine which are show or performance prospects. She will also continue to evaluate the personalities of the pet-quality dogs for more successful pairing with prospective buyers.

6. A reputable breeder is happy to provide you with references including people who have purchased her puppies in the past, other breeders, and the veterinarian(s) who cares for her dogs.

7. A reputable breeder will ask you to sign a contract that details not only what she expects of you, but also what you can expect of her. The contract will include some form of health guarantee and, with rare exception, will require your agreement to neuter your pup at the appropriate age. The contract will also spell out your breeder's ongoing involvement throughout your dog's lifetime. She will be an enthusiastic source of support and advice for you, and will want to be informed about any

significant health issues that arise. Not only might this health feedback influence future breeding decisions, she will want to provide a "heads up" to the people who adopted your dog's littermates. Additionally, if for any reason and at any age, your dog needs to be "rehomed" the reputable breeder will want to be involved in the process. She would never want one of her dogs to wind up in a shelter or passed from home to home.

8. A reputable breeder does not accept credit cards. She simply doesn't sell enough puppies to make this worthwhile.

9. A reputable breeder sends her pups to their new homes via automobile or within the passenger compartment of the airplane accompanied by a responsible human. They are never transported in the baggage compartment of an airplane.

10. A reputable breeder works with one breed, or occasionally two. She truly has a love affair with the breed and has focused a huge amount of her time and energy researching all of its particular nuances. She views "designer hybrids" such as

Labradoodles (Labradors crossed with Poodles) and Puggles (Pugs crossed with Beagles) to be no different than any other mixed breed of dog. They detract from, rather than enhance the breed she loves so dearly.

11. A reputable breeder shows her dogs in American Kennel Club recognized conformation shows and/or breed-related performance events (obedience, agility, hunting tests/field trial, tracking, herding, etc.). Her dogs may earn AKC good citizen certificates. All of these are clear-cut ways for others who are knowledgeable about the breed to evaluate her dogs. The breeder's pride will be evident when she shows you the certificates and trophies detailing the accolades and accomplishments of the dogs she's produced.

12. A reputable breeder has a job other than breeding puppies (unless she happens to be independently wealthy). Breeding pups to pay the mortgage and put groceries on the table inevitably leads to making poor breeding choices. As one of my

colleagues recommends, "Ask the breeder if she makes money breeding dogs. If she says, 'No,' or better yet, laughs while saying no, you can figure she is a decent breeder."

If you would like to respond to this publicly, please visit <http://speakingforspot.com/blog/?p=749>.

Best wishes to you and your four-legged family members for much good health. •

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ers who select their ideal animals and reproduce them in the hope of getting further generations of similarly – ideal descendants. Unfortunately, as those who have tried it know, like does not always beget like. It is true that a Siberian is a Siberian and a Poodle is a Poodle but when we produce dogs that are deficient in one way or another and falling below our ideals, it would behoove us to find out why such variations occur, to also determine in what proportions the variant types are to be expected, and to learn how to make more likely the probability that ideal animals will beget ideal offspring.

Genetics is not simply a matter of 3:1 ratios. Some of the most important traits with which the breeder should be concerned do not segregate in any recognizable ratio whatever. Differences in ability to produce, tight verses sickle tails, excessive body length, long, very short, or the medium-length coat, and now normal or affected eyes along with a raft of other characteristics are certainly inherited. Developmental genetics deals with the question: How does the invisible gene produce the visible character? For example: How do genes for albinism cause some animals to lack melanic pigment? How do genes for inherited dwarfism in various species cause the retardation of growth that the breeder of Basset Hounds likes and the breeder of Alaskan Malamutes does not? How do the genes for determination of sex make some dogs male and others female? These are all good genetic problems, even though none deals with a simple 3:1 ratio.

Finally, genetics is inseparably bound to the big question of how evolution of species and subspecies has been brought about. This entails a study of the frequencies of various genes in wild animals and the relation of those genes to the fitness of different individual animals to survive. It is up to us as breeders to study the frequency of genes in our breeding stock and devise systems to show how those frequencies might be altered by different methods of selection. •

Genetics

By Carol Dixon

"Genetics," said Bateson, when he proposed the name in 1906 for the baby in the family of biological sciences, "is the science dealing with heredity and variation, seeking to discover laws governing similarities and differences in individuals related by descent."

The terms heredity and variation should be defined according to genetic usage before we go any further. The true geneticist's concept of inheritance is a little more specialized than those of some others who use the term. We have no quarrel with the man and says that he inherited his father's land. The usage, long familiar not only to the happy benefactor, and to the disappointed ones but also to the lawyer who thrives on disputes between the two, has nothing to do with biological inheritance.

Once again we turn to the dictionary and it's definition of the word heredity, the "Hereditary transmission of the physical and psychical characters of parents to their offspring." This is a fairly good definition, but not a perfect one, because it does not rule the transmission from parent to offspring of something NOT hereditary. In the genes that a pup receives through the nucleus of its mother's ovum and from the nucleus of its father's spermatozoon that fertilized the egg, are contained all the pups' hereditary potentialities. Some of these, like the color of its puppy coat and its sex, are evident at birth. Others, like the ultimate size, color of adult coat and ability to reproduce itself, become evident at maturity.

At times a bitch may transmit a disease to the pup that is not inherited through the genes. These diseases are thus transmitted from the parents to the offspring, but are not truly inherited as are traits caused by the genes. But in the genetic make-up of the pup there are

some genes that determine whether or not the young pup can withstand these transmitted infections and/or whether they will weaken and die. **Conditions passed in a germ cell from parent to offspring, but outside the nucleus and not through genes, are sometimes said to be transmitted by cytoplasmic inheritance to distinguish them from heredity through the genes.**

In the original opening statement we also find the word "variation." Let's look at that now. Some are caused by heredity, but much of it is caused by the environment. We must be intelligent enough to realize that both sides of this coin have merit and to be sympathetic to both schools of thought. Much time and considerable effort has been put into study determining how much of the variation in some plant or animal is caused by genes and how much by environment.

The familiar saying "like begets like" has long been the guiding principle for dog breed-