

Choosing a Responsible Breeder

Adding a dog to your family can certainly add a great deal of joy to your life. To increase the likelihood that you and your new family member will be a good match it's important to do your homework. There are many informative sites and books on choosing the breed that best fits your lifestyle. Certainly those of us with rescue dogs will tell you it can be a joyous thing to adopt a dog through an animal shelter or rescue group, but if you want to buy your puppy from a breeder, where do you start?

The internet is a wonderful source of information. Used wisely, you can go a long way in learning more about the breed you're considering. There are many email groups you can join to learn more about a breed.

What are the hallmarks of a good breeder?

* A good breeder breeds to the standard. What does that mean? All breeds have a standard by which they are measured. The standard is what makes a Havanese a Havanese and not a Lhasa Apso. Do your homework. (<http://akc.org> is a good place to start). Know the breed standard for the breed in which you are interested. Don't fall for the idea that you are getting a "rare color" or some other variation that is outside the standard for your breed. There is a reason the standard exists.

*Good breeders participate in dog shows or a variety of other competitive events, such as obedience or agility trials, sporting breed field trials, northern breed sled racing, and similar events. All of these help breeders to know where their dogs stand in relationship to the breed standard. They use this information to determine their dogs' strengths and weaknesses and what they need to address in their breeding program. They look at their dogs with a critical but loving eye. This is always to the benefit of the breed and to you, the consumer.



* A good breeder provides information regarding health testing. All dogs should have, as a minimum, testing for eyes (CERF) and hips (OFA or PennHip). If you have done your research on a breed, you will know what health concerns there are in your breed of choice. ALL breeds have health concerns. If a breeder tells you the breed has no health problems, look some place else. All breeders know their breed's health issues and by acknowledging this are able to use this information in making breeding decisions. This is why they do health testing. Responsible breeders will list the tests and the dogs' scores or clearances.

*A good breeder is a member of a local and/or national breed club and registers puppies with a registry. In the U.S., registration with AKC (American Kennel Club), UKC (United Kennel Club), the ARBA (American Rare Breed Association) or the foreign registries - the CKC (Canadian Kennel Club) or FCI (Federation Cynologique Internationale) - are considered acceptable registries. Many other registries were started after the AKC instituted the Frequently Used Sires (FUS) requirement which requires DNA certification of a male dog used to sire more than 3 litters in a year or 7 litters in his lifetime. Some litters have been turned down by the AKC because of violation of this requirement and many other breeders are boycotting AKC as they cannot, or will not, meet AKC's more stringent requirements for breeders. Many new registries were begun in response to the FUS requirement.

Some examples of registries that should set off alarms that you are not dealing with a responsible breeder include:
ACA (American Canine Association)

APR (American Purebred Registry)
APRI (America`s Pet Registry Inc.)
ARU (Animal Registry Unlimited)
CKC (Continental Kennel Club)
FIC (Federation of International Canines)
NAPDR (North American Purebred Dog Registry)
USKC (United States Kennel Club)
WKC (World Kennel Club)
WWKC (World Wide Kennel Club)

Please note that some of the registries have similar or the same initials as the older and well established registries. This can cause confusion for consumers. Don't be fooled.

Even if the puppy you are getting is registered with a traditional registry, think twice before buying from a kennel that utilizes alternative registries. If the breeder is raising healthy dogs in a manner which complies with the high standards of a traditional registry, why wouldn't all their dogs be registered with them?

* All good breeders will sell with a contract. If you are buying a pet, the contract should be for limited registration with a spay/neuter agreement. Good breeders are concerned about the pet population and they`re also concerned about THEIR puppy! They know the extent of work and commitment that goes into raising quality dogs. Offspring of dogs sold on limited registration cannot be registered with legitimate registries.

* If you are interested in showing your dog in conformation, the breeder should be seeking to mentor you or know that you have a mentor that understands the ins and outs of conformation. Know what you are signing. Do not agree to "puppy back" agreements if you are a novice unless you know you have sufficient help in not only whelping a litter but in making decisions about placement of the puppies. Do not allow yourself to be pressured into making a decision to show or breed your dog. There is a lot involved and a good breeder knows that a female is at risk when whelping, particularly if she is with an inexperienced owner.

* A good breeder does not allow puppies to leave their mother before at least 8 weeks of age. Even when a puppy is weaned, it is being socialized in the litter. They learn how to interact with the world. Bite inhibition is one example of a lesson missed by puppies removed at an early age from their mother.



* Good breeders focus their attention on only one breed or a couple of breeds. A lot of time goes into learning about their breed of choice. They know they can't spread their efforts over more than one or two, or possibly three breeds. Their efforts are in the quality of dog, not the quantity.

*A good breeder is going to ask you questions to make sure you and the breed of dog you are considering are a good match. Responsible breeders want to make a placement for life. They`re careful to place their puppies in homes where they`re truly members of the family. Be honest with them and you can learn a lot.

*A good breeder is willing to answer your questions about the breed and may have books or websites they refer you to for more information.

For more information on finding a responsible breeder, visit these websites:

<http://www.akc.org/breeds/breederinfo/respbrdr.cfm>

<http://www.wonderpuppy.net/breeding.htm#findbreeder>

<http://www.puppymills.com/>

<http://timbreblue.com/petdogs-l/getting/brquestions.htm>

You may request a master copy of this information for publication in brochure format and the other materials on choosing a responsible breeder and what is a puppy mill by contacting the owner of this site for the mailing address and sending one dollar to cover postage.

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