

What To Ask When You Go To A Breeder

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Sadly, not all people professing to be reputable and responsible breeders are. A good breeder will all but interrogate you. You should also have the chance to question the breeder. If you are not sure or uneasy with an answer, do not hesitate to ask for an explanation. If at any time you get an uneasy feeling or just are not satisfied, look elsewhere. A few things to ask about are:

1. What is the asking price of the puppies? Some breeders will ask the same for pet quality and show potential puppies. Compare prices with other breeders of the same breed and if the price is considerably higher or lower do not hesitate to ask why. Do not hesitate to ask why if there is a big difference in pet and show pups. Unless there is a visible disqualification or the puppy visibly will not be showing potential, the younger the pup the harder it is to determine show quality. A person who really knows the breed can have a good idea what pups have show POTENTIAL and what may not. Much happens while the puppy grows and that eight-week show prospect may not be show potential at 9 months! In addition, avoid ANY breeder who charges different for males or females or who charges extra if you want a pedigree or registration. It is not that expensive to register a litter so the potential owners can individually register puppies. (Many kennel clubs like the AKC require all litters to be registered by the breeder. Then papers are sent out that are given to buyers of puppies so the owner can register them in their name).

2. What health tests have been done on BOTH parents of the litter? Any breed should have hips (OFA or PennHip) eyes (CERF) and ideally thyroid. Then is up to you as potential buyer to know what other tests the breed you are looking at should have. The breeder should be able to show documentations of all tests. Do not blindly accept their word – some dishonest breeders will lie and say all tests have been done. Moreover, if the breeder says there is nothing in the line, so testing is not important, avoid this person as well. Some health problems are polygenetic (more than one set of genes involved – not a simple dominant/recessive). Some health problems take years to show fully or may be there but not showing outwardly. For example, some dysplastic dogs never show signs of having it and it is only diagnosed upon testing.

3. What temperament testing and socialization has been done? Granted, young puppies should not leave the property due to a growing immune system; however, the breeder should expose the puppies to as many things as possible like vacuum cleaners, children, house sounds, etc. The older the puppy, the more experiences it should have. Has the breeder temperament tested and what method was used? A good breeder will help match the right personality to you. If you are a quiet family and the breeder pushes a

dominant pup on you, leave. On the other hand, if you like the look of one puppy and the breeder, after interviewing you, decides it is not the right match, respect that.

4. What goals does the breeder have with the breeding program and how does the breeder go about to achieve this? If the breeder breeds just to produce more dogs, for pets only or anything that does not go towards the bettering of the breeder's lines and the breed as a whole, go elsewhere. In addition, if the breeder breeds for working ability first, you could end up with a handful! Look for one who breeds for companionship as well as type and working ability – unless you are looking exclusively for a working dog.

5. What does the breeder feel are the strengths and weaknesses in the breed and the breeder's program? The breeder should be open with you about the program and where they hope to go with it. Avoid the breeder who insists there are no better dogs around than his.

6. Can you see the pedigrees of both sire and dam? Can you see at least the dam? The sire may not be on site but the dam should be. If not, you could be dealing with a broker (one who sells dogs not bred by that person).

7. What type of contract does the breeder have for pet or show puppies (it should include a spay/neuter agreement and health guarantee)? Do not get pressured into becoming contracted to show or breed your dog – even if you do plan to show and possibly get into breeding someday. Everything should be spelled out in the contract. Be wary of a breeder sells you a young puppy that is "definitely show quality." So much happens during growth and development – the younger the puppy; the harder it is to tell show quality. A breeder who really knows the breed can tell if a young pup has POTENTIAL but should not be guaranteeing the dog will be a show dog. Another red flag is the breeder who has no written contract at all. All puppies whether pet or show potential should be sold with a written contract.

8. What does the breeder feed the puppies? You want to try to keep the puppies on the same brand of food as long as it is a quality brand. If the breeder uses something you do not, gradually wean the puppy to your preferred brand. If the puppies have no boosters prior to leaving the dam, look elsewhere.

9. What inoculations have been given? Eight-week-old puppies should have had their first set of inoculations and you should be given documentation of this. If not, go elsewhere.

10. Can you get references of previous puppy buyers? If the breeder will not give them, go elsewhere.

11. Can you have your own vet examine the puppy before you fully commit? You may be asked to put down a deposit but you should have the option of having your vet examine the puppy with in a couple days after purchase (always a good idea to have this done and the breeder may require it).

12. Are you active in any breed clubs (all breed or ideally breed specialty)? Many clubs have a breeder code of ethics that they want their members to adhere to. Just being AKC registered is not a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. It just means the puppy was from registered parents and the breeder has taken the steps to begin the registration process for the puppies. Even pet stores can sell AKC registered pups if the miller registers the dogs. The AKC cannot police everyone professing a breeder so again, being an educated consumer is very important.

Use your gut instinct and do not be suckered by cute faces. Remember, this pup will be yours for the next ten years or much longer depending on breed. You should get the best possible puppy possible from the most responsible source you can find.

Many of these questions can be adapted to ask at a rescue as well. Do not hesitate to ask what is known about the background of the puppies (or adult dog); what medical care they have had and has the staff noticed anything about their temperaments that could be of concern? Ask about the adoption agreement and have it gone through carefully with you.