

A Guide for Breeders and Buyers

INTRODUCTION:

A potential puppy buyer should understand they are purchasing a companion ideally for the next 15 years. A careful selection will dramatically increase the chances that this will be a healthy, delightful companion, rather than an expensive, stressful drain on your family's finances and emotions. The breeder of your next pet literally holds your future in their hands.

The primary determining factor of a litter's quality (meaning health, looks, and temperament), will be the puppy's parents. A responsible breeder puts a great deal of thought into each litter, matching parents based on health issues, temperament, looks, and performance records. However, don't expect to be able to see both parents in the breeder's own kennel. Most breeders looking to improve their stock and produce a quality litter will use an outside stud dog. As a matter of fact, that may be one of the easiest ways to determine whether a breeder is striving for quality or just breeding for profit. There are exceptions, of course, but typically only the most established breeders will own a stud dog of such quality as to be the very best match for their bitch. Proximity is usually not a valid reason for a breeding.

The second critical factor in a puppy's future is how it is raised. Much research has been done on critical periods of puppy development, and the consensus is overwhelming--puppies need lots of human contact. And while there is no magic age for separating a pup from its littermates and dam, there is conclusive evidence that no puppy should leave the breeder before seven weeks. In addition, a puppy that remains kenneled with its litter for much beyond 12 weeks without receiving a great deal of human contact and varied environments is likely to develop training or temperament problems. Certainly older puppies and dogs are placed successfully all the time, but a breeder must put a great deal of effort into the care and training of a puppy to ensure its development into a secure, well-behaved companion. If you are considering a dog over 12 weeks of age, check to be sure the dog has received proper socialization during its critical developmental periods.

Good breeders put a good deal of time and effort into socializing their litters. Research has shown that mild stress in the form of specific daily handling and testing increases a puppy's brain capacity. While these tests are not mandatory for a satisfactory companion, they are the ideal. Breeders with multiple litters at the same time are not able to give each puppy individual attention, and should be considered with caution. There is a wide spectrum in care and socialization; ask questions and visit many kennels and you'll begin to see a marked difference in the personalities of the dogs you meet.

While breeders utilize a wide variety of facilities for puppy raising, from elaborate kennel buildings to garages to living rooms, cleanliness and human contact is what's important, not the fanciest setup. As pack animals, puppies learn from their mother that their "den" should remain clean, and eventually they begin to go further and further from their sleeping area to soil. This is what makes the domesticated dog such a wonderful companion, they are generally very easy to housetrain. However, a litter that is kept in a dirty pen learns to disregard where they potty, making them very difficult to housetrain.

BREEDERS RESPONSIBILITIES:

Most contracts include basic health warranties and requirements for basic care on the owner's part. Breeders carry an enormous burden to produce healthy, beautiful dogs that conform to the breed's standard for looks, temperament, and working ability while being free of genetic disease. Making color, sex and other superficial characteristics your priorities increases your risk of not getting a healthy companion for a lifetime. Responsible breeders love contact from puppy buyers only interested in a quality dog, but will be patient with your desire for a particular color or sex if you are willing to wait for the right one to be available.

- Each breeding with the resulting puppies should meet the PSLRA Code of Ethics or breeder should have a good reason why the breeding took place on preliminary clearances. In either case breeder should be able to explain why this particular match of stud dog and brood bitch took place.
- Buyers should be able to meet both parents or at least see pictures of the one(s) not on the premises, with all pedigrees and clearances documented.
- Puppies should be born in the house (or similar environment) where there is an abundance of human interaction and other stimuli. Puppies should appear to be well socialized.
- All areas where the puppies and other dogs are kept should be clean with obvious marked attention to their safety and well being. Temperature should be kept at comfortable levels. As the puppies out-grow their whelping box, their puppy pen should be the same: clean, comfortable and safe.

- Puppies should appear to be content and not under any stress, either as to health or environment.
- Puppies should be on a worming schedule from 2-3 weeks and every 2 weeks following
- First vaccination should have been given by 7 weeks.
- Puppies should not be available for going to their new homes prior to 7 weeks.
- It is highly recommended that all puppies should have had their eyes checked by a licensed ophthalmologist and be microchipped prior to going to their new homes.
- Buyers should be given instructions regarding care and feeding of the puppy. This should take place in plenty of time for them to prepare for the day they take their puppy home.
- Potential buyers should receive a copy of the contract/guarantee prior to any deposit being made, in order for them to completely understand both their and the breeder obligations.
- Buyers should be treated with complete honesty and openness. They have a right to expect respect and consideration. All agreements between Buyer and Breeder should be spelled out in writing. Deposits and payments on any particular puppy should be written out, with any reservations clearly documented.
- All paperwork should be available at time of pick-up. This includes but is not limited to AKC registration application, seller/buyer contract and/or guarantee, puppy instructions, individual health record showing worming, vaccinations, etc., copies of pedigrees and parent clearances, any other information the breeder deems important.
- Buyers should expect eager and friendly follow up care after their puppy is taken home. In fact, breeders should be available for consultation and take an interest in each dog's welfare for its entire life.

BUYER RESPONSIBILITIES:

Contracts and guarantees can be an important consideration when purchasing a puppy. However, remember that a contract is only as good as the person offering it, and that there are no ironclad guarantees when breeding animals. A breeder can do everything considered normal and appropriate to breed healthy animals, and still produce the occasional genetic health issue. Knowing this, most responsible breeders sell their puppies as pets only, with AKC Limited Registration papers to ensure the animals are not bred from indiscriminately. Consider this a sign of a responsible breeder rather than an unneeded restriction. If you are interested in breeding your dog, speak with the breeder and make your wishes known. Most breeders will want to discourage a novice pet owner from breeding their dog, for a variety of valid reasons. Please be honest with your intentions.

- Buyers should know that every breeder may have different rules regarding visits to their litters. Please understand and abide by them. They are established to keep the puppies and their mother healthy.
- Buyers should be completely honest and forthright as to their home situation, how this puppy will be raised and kept throughout its lifetime, and all of their expectations in acquiring this new family member.
- Buyers should understand that breeders are aiming to produce puppies that will fulfill a particular goal such as conformation shows, field events, agility trials, service etc. Those puppies in a particular litter that appear to have those qualities will be earmarked for homes that will take that puppy to its full potential. Few lay persons would be able to make these distinctions. In no way are the other puppies in a litter inferior. A well-thought out breeding with the proper raising to 8 weeks (see breeder responsibilities) and continuing on in its new home with good care and training will produce wonderful, sound and attractive pets.
- Buyers should further understand that a breeder who takes such pains with a litter as described above and gets to know the prospective buyers and their home situations, will be able to best match each puppy to a particular home and family with greater chances of success than if the buyer makes his/her own choice. Many breeders, in fact, insist on making that final decision. Buyers also need to understand that most breeders will not release puppies until they are 8 weeks old, and never before 7 weeks.
- Buyers should not put a deposit down unless they are sure they want a puppy from a particular litter. Both the buyer and the breeder need to understand each other regarding choice of puppy. All such understandings and any exceptions or conditions should be in writing.
- Buyers may have to realize that they may have to be on a breeder waiting list in order to purchase a puppy from that breeder and/or to purchase the color and sex that they want.
- Buyers should familiarize themselves completely with the paperwork and information that a breeder provides. Breeders welcome the opportunity to answer any questions and concerns.
- Buyers should fully understand and agree with all the terms of any contract/guarantee they will have with the breeder upon the final purchase of their puppy.