

# GETTING THE RIGHT PUPPY FOR YOU

*Reputable breeder? Pet Store? Backyard breeder? Which is the best source to purchase from? Good questions to ask, how to interpret the answers & warning signs.*

*Here's how to make an educated choice from the right source.*

QUESTIONS TO THE BREEDER AND/OR SELLER OF PUPPIES	COMMERCIAL BREEDER, PUPPY MILL, BROKER, BACKYARD BREEDER PET STORE, NEWSPAPER AD STREET VENDORS	PROFESSIONAL, ETHICAL, PUREBRED BREEDER, REGISTERED WITH CKC	<b>SIGNS OF TROUBLE: SOME RED FLAGS</b>
<i>Why do you breed dogs?</i>	"I produce many puppies of breeds that are currently popular in the market."  "Dog breeding is my business."	"I have a primary interest in producing the best "x" breed I can. I love the breed. I breed to produce healthy dogs and also pet dogs for nurturing families that I interview first and screen. Temperament, health and breed type are my priorities."	Breeds more than three breeds. A commercial kennel. Will tell you that their breed is perfect for you. "Good with kids, easy to train, great for anyone." Dogs are sold to anyone who pays the price. Does not ask you questions about your lifestyle, home environment, work schedules, young children, etc. Breeds to make money/profit.
<i>Do you have puppies now?</i>	"I have four or more litters per year. I have a puppy for you to pick and take home today." Has several litters of different breeds on site.	"I have one or two litters per year. You may need to wait."	Primary interest in the sale. Selling today to anyone with money. May offer you a pup of a different breed. "Don't go home without a pup!"
<i>Are you a member of any dog-related clubs?</i>	Rarely a member of any club, or in-name only and not active. May criticize dog breed club in an unprofessional manner.	Generally belongs to a national breed club, local club if any, and will refer you to other club members with puppies if necessary.	No club memberships or association with other breeders. Active marketing on the Internet! Always has an ad in the newspaper as puppies are always available.
<i>What activities do you do with your dogs?</i>	Rarely involved in any activities, dog sports, therapy visits, and obedience, conformation or performance events.	Usually involved in dog-related events. Active in club activities, Breed "Fundays", seminars, meetings, etc. Will suggest participation and have info available. Can refer you to people who are resources for these. Breeders will show their dogs in conformation. May be active in obedience, flyball, agility or therapy work as well.	Rarely engage in dog-related activities except selling dogs. Will claim that their breed is excellent in all activities.

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>COM'L BREEDER/PUPPY MILL</b>	<b>REPUTABLE BREEDER</b>	<b>RED FLAGS</b>
<i>What photos and stories do you have of your dogs?</i>	May promise photos, but usually have none. No stories of dogs they have bred.	Many photos and stories, albums, in fact can talk for hours about their dogs. Many have websites.	One or two photos of pup's parents, maybe poor quality. Maybe a brochure to impress. Same photos used for years.
<i>How do you raise your puppies?</i>	Commercial breeders' dogs maybe cared for by employee(s) and live in kennels, rarely in the house. Customers not allowed in dog breeding or puppy areas. Brokers will have others raise puppies off-site. No info is offered on location or methods of puppy rearing.	Purebred dogs are part of the family, spending hours each day interacting with family members. Kennel or crate area is clean and comfortable. Dogs appear happy. You are invited to inspect area where puppies play and are raised.	Conditions are basic and maybe unsanitary and crowded. Dogs spend most of their time in kennels. "Home-raised" means raised on the property, maybe in a barn as livestock or an out-building not attached to the home of the breeder.
<i>Are your dogs registered and titled (Champions) with the CKC?</i>	Pet store puppies may be registered with AKC then bulk shipped from puppy mills in the U.S. Sometimes backyard breeders will not register puppies, if only to hide the number of pups being produced. Rarely titled.	All breeding dogs registered. All pups come with registration at no added charge. Many with titles: champion, obedience, agility, earthdog, etc. Puppies will be microchipped or tattooed before leaving breeder's premises.	Volume producers often "lose" "papers." Some dogs are mixed breeds, "designer dogs," that cannot be registered with AKC. Mixes have increased chance of genetic disease – combining two gene pools.
<i>Breeder's communication style</i>	Vague responses, tends to discourage questions, especially about health and socialization. Contact through post office box and message service. Often first-name-only basis and no kennel name. Appears to know everything about dogs.	Responds with specific information, interested in your questions. Complete contact information offered. Readily discusses health screening, socialization of pups, placement issues, etc. Proud of his/her breed. Clear interest in learning about dogs and sharing information.	Puppy mill breeder may only know general information about dogs. May say he/she is selling pups of a friend. Gives you the impression that he/she has something to hide.
<i>How do you manage your breeding practice?</i>	Many dogs, unlikely breeder will tell you how many. Dogs will be in prime breeding age (1 – 3 yrs.). Older, non-breeding dogs are "gone." Many females, few males. Females bred as often as possible, then "retired" or simply put down.	Fewer dogs and dogs with a larger age range, with some retired dogs as pets. Females bred to selected males. Not bred until second season or 18 months old nor after six years. Stud dogs may not live with breeder.	Commercial breeder may not know much about each dog, except that he/she is "really nice." Breeding uncontrolled. In conversations, emphasis is on the pup, not the parents. Defensive about questions, even hostile.
<i>Is every dog's pedigree available?</i>	Commercial breeders avoid presenting pedigrees, often un-available or inaccurate. Unimportant. Some list sire and dam only. No pedigrees for mix breed designer dogs. No info available about health history of relatives of puppies.	Breeders of purebreds have complete five-generation pedigree on all dogs and can discuss health screenings. One or both parents or many relatives are likely to be CKC conformation champions.	Not important to commercial breeders, call names good enough. Breed line is "nice" or "good." May have a few "champs" in the pedigree.

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<i>Do you do health screens and genetic testing of dogs before you breed them?</i>	Does not do health testing. Breeder needs pups to live until your check clears the bank. Speaks in vague terms about "no problems" or "minor problems." Makes you feel like you are being treated like a gullible child.	Keeps up-to-date with genetic problems in the breed. Tests prospective parents before breeding, including annual vet ophthalmology exams. Willing to share results. Gives you the feeling they have nothing to hide and that your concerns are respected.	If breeder says, "there are no problems in my lines," run the other way. Don't believe they test until they show you test results on the clinic form or website: CERF, or "Canine Eye Registration Foundation" and OFA, "Orthopedic Foundation for Animals"
<i>Can you match a pup to our family?</i>	They're all "healthy and ready to go." Maintains there are no important differences between pups.	Specialty breeder can discuss each pup's coat type, color, size and build, aptitude, temperament, and can match his personality to your family. Some breeders will insist on choosing the right pup for you.	Commercial breeder may say something like, "there are no real differences between pups" and "parents of all these dogs are really nice."
<i>Can we visit your kennel and see how the dogs are kept?</i>	Does not encourage visitors. Kennels and dogs probably not clean. Dogs may also be unsocialized and engage in fear barking and aggression. For puppy broker establishments, pups are not raised on the premises.	Insists on meeting you and your family before sale of puppy. Welcomes your visit, and will introduce you to your prospective pup's dam (and sire, if present). Parents are good indicators of health, temperament, and socialization of pups.	Visitors unwelcome and unnecessary, selling is done through direct newspaper ads, pet shops, the Internet, or indirectly through brokers who sell directly to pet shops.
<i>How do you socialize the puppies to prepare them for lives in human families?</i>	Usually has no plan. Pups raised with litter mates in kennels, garages, basements, pole barns, etc. Often fearful of humans and various noises. Spend fear-imprint stages (3-5 weeks and especially 8-10 weeks of age) subjected to uncontrolled environment. This can have a huge impact on temperament combined with lack of human handling and being raised in an isolated rural environment.	Purebred breeders follow a socialization plan based on decades of scientific study and successful socialization. The plan typically ensures pups become confident, trusting, and well-behaved canine family members.	Commercial breeders are learning to say that their pups are "socialized," but with no evidence that they have done anything to prepare pups for their futures as family members. Pups will run and hide, unable to be touched by visitors. Normal puppies are confident, outgoing, friendly to strangers.
<i>What public relations do you do?</i>	Commercial breeders advertise regularly and widely in the media, on signs and postings. Sometimes use a rudimentary questionnaire to collect information from interested families.	Will often have a website with kennel history and photos, noting that pups are available to screened families. Breeders often have waiting lists. Information focused on dogs' accomplishments and breed info. May use in-depth questionnaires to initiate conversations with interested families.	Regular newspaper advertising, with post office box number or e-mail address. Information focused on making a sale.

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<i>What references can you provide?</i>	May or may not supply references. May stall and eventually not provide.	References from breed club, all-breed club, veterinarian, current pet families.	Hostile to questions. Commercial breeders may say, "if you don't trust me, then maybe you should not get one of my puppies."
<i>How do you match pups with families?</i>	First come, first served. Anyone with the asking price gets a pup. All pups described as "show potential" or "pets only". Pups sold as early as 6 weeks old, with 7-8 weeks old average.	Breeders of purebreds will choose pup or guide the selection. Care given to match temperament with family. Dogs placed in new "show homes" only after breeder knows and trusts the knowledge and ethics of the new owners with a detailed sales contract and conditions. Pups placed usually 10 – 14 weeks old or older.	May charge higher price for "show potential" dog. Commercial breeders are interested in moving their stock out to make room for the next litter(s). Older pups need more attention and are more expensive to keep. To commercial breeders, it is all about cutting costs and increasing profit.
<i>How does the puppy get to its family?</i>	Would rather ship the pup to its new family, it discourages personal contact with new family. Decreases likelihood of post-sale contact. Will deliver to your door or rendezvous at a third party location.	Prefers or requires personal contact and family pick-up. May ship, but with every precaution taken.	Commercial breeder may ship entire litters to contact person, broker, or pet shop. Shipping can speed up the transaction. Often shipped very young (5 – 6 wks) to take advantage of cute puppy appearance for sales.
<i>What is the price for a puppy?</i>	Often charges less or the same as specialty breeders, even though their costs of production are a fraction of the purebred breeder's costs. Sometimes charges more for a gender, a color, or a self-described "show prospect". May charge less for the "runt".	Usually willing to discuss price and payment options. No pups placed with life-threatening genetic defect(s). Pups with cosmetic or surgical repairs placed with full knowledge and agreement of new owner(s)	Commercial breeders may discount dogs with genetic defect(s).
<i>What health guarantee do you offer?</i>	May have health guarantee listed in contract. Will offer some form of refund if puppy returned, knowing that most families will not want to relinquish pup if they have kept/bonded to it after a period of time.	Basic health guarantees in contract, usually against genetic problems, good until pup's aged one to two years. Conditions and obligations clearly outlined and explained in contract.	Commercial contract lists diseases but not conditions and breeder obligations. Likely to blame owners for health problems. Often will not return phone calls and avoids contact with buyer.

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<i>What sales contract do you offer?</i>	Usually has a sales receipt with pup's information on it.	Purebred breeder always has a written sales contract, clearly spelling out the responsibilities and obligations of both parties. Registration papers withheld until "pets" are spayed/neutered. Contract includes breeder's "right of first refusal," allowing breeder to act in accordance to all Club (local and national) codes of ethics: to accept and re-home any dog he/she has produced for the life of the dog.	Commercial breeders may offer generic puppy care instruction sheet.
<i>What information and supplies do you offer with each puppy?</i>	May or may not supply information and supplies. Rarely health information and pedigree.	Purebred breeders often supply educational material (feeding, care, training), pedigree, health screens (CERF, OFA), photos, toys, book, blanket, even crates.	Maybe a few sheets of basic information, some information might have been plagiarized.
<i>What future contact do you offer?</i>	No time for new owners or for the dogs they bred. Caveat emptor.	Will remain in contact offering support and advice, teaching grooming techniques, information about health screens and general health care, etc, for the life of the dog or longer!	Once the sale is concluded, commercial breeders are done with the customers. They accept no further responsibility for their "product." Buyer beware. These breeders' dogs are flooding animal shelters. The dog you "save" is replaced by another. Your purchase keeps them in business. <b><i>Think before you buy!</i></b>