

Questions to ask your Breeder

If you are looking for a puppy, choosing the right breeder is extremely important, but it can be difficult. We have compiled a list of questions you may want to ask each breeder you are considering. Remember, doing ample research up front, both into the breed and into each breeder, can save you time, money, and heartache in the future. And remember, by getting a puppy from a breeder, you are effectively supporting that breeder's philosophy and approach to breeding, so take the time up front to learn all you can. There is no such thing as asking too many questions!

Some general questions to ask breeders:

Why do you breed your dogs? What is your motivation or philosophy as a breeder?

Look for someone who truly breeds to better the breed, and whose actions back that up.

How long have you been in this breed? Do you now, or have you in the past, bred other breeds?

Experience counts. It can take many years to learn the breed, conformation, personality traits, good quality lines, health issues, etc. Also, someone who bounces around from breed to breed, based on what is popular, may not be breeding for the right reasons.

What characteristics are important to you in choosing to breed an adult? Someone knowledgeable about the breed, their dogs, conformational and health issues, will be able to answer this question easily.

How many adult dogs do you have, and how did you select them?

This should be obvious... it's not exactly possible to set some fixed number and say more than that is bad. But clearly, there is a limit to the number of dogs one person, or one family, can properly care for. So use your judgement and ask follow-up questions if necessary.

Where do your adult dogs live? Describe their environment. (if you can't go visit, then ask for pictures!)

Get specific! Ask about their play area, where they sleep and eat, how they interact with the family, etc.

How many litters did you have last year?

Again, it's not really possible to set a number that is good. But obviously, fewer litters likely means more care, thought, and planning went into each one.

What are some of the health issues, such as common genetic defects, present in the breed?

A good breeder will be very knowledgeable about the breed and be able to answer this question. Remember, EVERY breed has health issues known to exist in the breed.

What health tests do you do on your adults before choosing to breed them? EDUCATE yourself on health screenings that are available and recommended for the breed. This site contains much relevant information on that, as does the national breed club website for each breed. Getting a puppy from parents who have had breed-appropriate screenings will reduce the chances of certain health problems; plus, by getting a puppy from screened parents, you are helping support practices that do improve the breed overall.

What registry do you use? Why did you choose that registry?

There are many opinions on registries, and you can find them in discussion boards all over the net. While having registration papers from any particular registry doesn't by itself guarantee a healthier puppy, or a better puppy, there are definitely differences among the policies and practices of registries. This is another area where you should do your homework and ask lots of questions.

What breed clubs are you active in?

Breed clubs and all-breed clubs are excellent ways for breeders to learn more about the breed, to participate in breed education, to organize rescue, and to facilitate shows and trials. Plus, most recognized national breed clubs have membership requirements, some more stringent than others, as well as a code of ethics.

Do you exhibit/show your dogs or compete in trials of any sort?

Conformation shows are considered the benchmark for affirming that a dog meets the physical standard for the breed; hunting, herding, and lure coursing trials, among others, demonstrate that a dog possesses the instincts and work functions that are part of the breed's purpose; agility trials, flyball, etc. show athleticism, skill, dedication, and trainability; and obedience trials show trainability and hard work. There are more, of course, and the list is growing. Participation in these events, and proving dogs prior to breeding them, shows a strong dedication to the breed and high personal standards in breeding.

Do you have pictures of pups from previous litters, now all grown up?

This question serves two purposes... one, it is good to see the results of prior breedings; two, this will tell you how well this breeder keeps in touch

with people who have gotten puppies in the past. You definitely want to choose a breeder who wants to stay in touch with you for the life of the dog!

Can you provide me with a list of references... people who have pups from you? (CALL THEM!)

Granted, no one, honest or otherwise, will give you the names and numbers of people who DON'T like them. So, any references provided will likely be good. But still, check them. Call and ask questions.

Can you provide at least one veterinary reference... the vet you currently use? (CALL HIM/HER!)

The breeder should be happy to have you talk to his/her veterinarian. A great question to ask the vet is, if you were interested in a puppy of this breed, would you consider getting one from this breeder?

...and questions about a specific litter or puppy...

Tell me about the sire and dam, both the positives and negatives.

No dog is perfect! Everyone loves their dogs and loves to brag about them, but you should expect a breeder to be honest about whatever weak points the parents have.

Are they both on site where I can see them (if visiting is an option)?

Of course the dam (mother) should be on site (if not, there should be a REALLY good explanation to ensure you aren't dealing with a BROKER). On the other hand, it's not necessarily bad if the sire (father) is not on site, if he belongs to someone else. Many breeders will look far and wide to find a strong, compatible male to use for a particular female, so the sire may even be in another state.

What types of genetic/health certifications do the parents have?

Again, educate yourself on health screenings. You may wish to ask for copies of any screenings; some can even be verified online.

What titles and/or points do the parents have?

Again, never be hesitant to ask for proof if you'd like. Owners of titled or pointed dogs are invariably proud of it and won't mind providing proof.

Where were the puppies born? Where are they being raised?

Health, sanitation, and socialization are all critical, and the environment of the puppies has a lot to do with it. Ask about how they're handled, when they will go to the vet the first time, etc. Many breeders don't allow people to handle or interact with pups until a certain age (often until after first

vaccines), so don't expect to be able to hold a week-old puppy. But ask for lots of pictures!

How do you evaluate the temperaments of the puppies?

While different breeds have differing standard personality traits, the fact remains that there is a great deal of variability within the breed, and even within one litter. A lot of a puppy's temperament develops through early socialization, both within the litter and with humans. So, recognizing personality differences among pups can help you choose a puppy that will likely fit your lifestyle. A breeder should be able to tell you about those differences and help you choose. Of course, there's not too much personality at 3 weeks of age, but by 5-6 weeks you should be able to ask this question. Also, there are standardized temperament tests that are gaining popularity, so ask about these as well.

What vaccinations, dewormings, etc. will the puppies have before they leave?

Once again, don't hesitate to ask for specifics. You may want to call your own vet and ask what he or she thinks are the appropriate vaccinations for the breed.

At what age do you let your puppies leave?

Different breeds develop at different rates, so take the time to research and decide what age you feel is acceptable. The national breed club websites usually have a recommendation listed there; sometimes it is on their code of ethics page. A responsible breeder will want to make sure the pups are fully weaned, eating well, have had time for vaccinations to become effective, and have been appropriately socialized before leaving for a new, strange home.

What will you supply with your puppies?

Most breeders will supply a pedigree automatically; if not, ask for one. If you are searching for a pet puppy, you may not think the pedigree is important, but get one anyway. The breeder's readiness to provide it shows how well the breeding was planned, plus it allows you to see the history of the lines and ask any questions about linebreeding. Make sure the breeder provides an adequate supply of the dog food the puppy has been eating. You will also want at least one familiar item for the puppy, like a blanket or toy. And of course the appropriate paperwork (see below)

And a few questions we believe to be CRITICAL, but are often forgotten, that we've saved for last...

What health guarantee does this puppy have? Please provide me with a copy.

You should examine the health guarantee before sending any deposit! Most health guarantees cover everything, including infections diseases like Parvo or Distemper, for a short period of time, then congenital/hereditary conditions for a longer time (often years, or lifetime). Read this carefully. Hopefully it is something you will never need, but the existence and content of the guarantee can tell you a lot about the breeder.

What about a contract? Please provide me with a copy (get this before ever sending ANY MONEY)

This can't be stressed enough. NEVER send money until you have a signed contract or agreement in your hands. This agreement will likely include the financial details, plus information about the registration, rights, ownership, spay/neuter, etc. Also, either in the contract or the health guarantee, you should find the breeder's take back policy, which details what would happen if you ever, for the lifetime of the dog, should be unable to keep the dog.

How exactly will this puppy be registered, what will be the limitations on registration, and when will I receive the registration paperwork?

Definitely make sure that specifics about registration are included in the contract or are provided separately, in writing, and are very clear before you send any deposit. Disputes over registration, paperwork, registry, etc. are one of the most common. Expect limited registration, plus a spay/neuter agreement, if you are not planning on show/competition.

If you can visit the breeder, DO IT. If you find a breeder who is too far away to drive and visit, then FLY TO THAT BREEDER to pick up your puppy, and stay long enough to visit the breeder's home. It's generally not much more expensive than the price to fly a puppy unaccompanied, and it's much safer for the puppy to fly back with you. Remember, all puppies are cute. But all breeders are not the same. Take your time, get to know any breeders you are interested in, and ask every question you can think of. If someone is uncomfortable with your questions or your determination, scratch them off the list and keep looking. You are not just choosing a puppy; you're choosing a breeder that you will want to stay in touch with for many years to come... someone who will be happy to help you, to answer your questions, and to give you good advice.