

What to look for in a breeder, checklist.

A breed fancier who usually has only one breed but may have two; follows a breeding plan in efforts to preserve and protect the breed; produces just a few litters a year; breeds only when a litter will enhance the breed and the breeding program; raises the puppies with plenty of environmental and human contact; has a contract that protects breeder, dog, and buyer; runs a small, clean kennel or home. They screen breeding stock to eliminate hereditary defects from the breed; work with a breed club or kennel club to promote and protect the breed; and care that each and every puppy is placed in the best home possible. Most likely they belong to their breeds National Breed club, and breed under the guidelines of a Code of Ethics. They are involved in dog activities. (showing, herding, field, obedience, lure coursing, agility, tracking, therapy, etc) Often times they are also involved in breed rescue.

Although you might pay less for the breed of your choice from a pet store or backyard breeder, it's almost a given that in the long run, you'll pay a good deal more in vet bills and perhaps emotional bills (if the dog has to be euthanized due to a health or temperament problem), than you would from a reputable breeder.

Registration

Neutral

Expect your puppy to be registered with one of the reputable stud books:

- American Kennel Club (AKC)
- Canadian Kennel Club (CKC)

These kennel clubs make some effort to ensure the very worst "breeders" can not register. For example, persons convicted of cruelty to animals are suspended from the AKC.

Remember however that a registration is simply a record that the dog is purebred. Registrations are given based upon the word of the breeder. No one from these organizations comes out to look at the litter or see how it's being raised.

Registration is NOT a sign of quality.

Red Lights

- If you come across a puppy that is registered at some other lesser-known registries, run away - very, very fast. There are a number of so-called registries that exist so that the puppy millers and others who have lost their privileges at the reputable organizations can continue to breed and sell puppies. It's not an easy thing to be suspended from these organizations. If someone has been, it's for a good reason.
- You may come across a litter or a pup that is not registered for some reason. Why was the litter not registered? Does the breeder care so little about what they are doing? Be sure to ask why the puppy or litter isn't registered. And carefully consider the answer. If you are looking for a good family companion and care little about a registration - this may be less of a red light for you.

Green Lights

- Puppies registered in multiple registries. This is called "cross registered". One of the registries will be the primary registry. Make sure it's one of the ones listed.

Payment

Neutral

- Expect your breeder to be willing to work with you when it comes to payment. Good breeders want their pups in the very best homes and will work with those homes to make that happen.
- Expect to place some kind of deposit on a pup that is not ready to go home yet.

Red Lights

- The ability to pay by credit card. This is a sign of a commercial operation. Commercial operations look to the bottom line - not necessarily the well being of their pups. It may be that the breeder has access to credit processing through another business. That would be OK, but check it out.
- A breeder unwilling to work out payment arrangements. This is less of a red light, particularly in areas where demand is high and supply is low. In these cases, the breeder may have a waiting list of outstanding homes for pups and may not need to be a flexible in this area.

Green Lights

- Breeders who offer "rebates" or "incentives". Breeders may offer rebates or incentives to their buyers for providing proof of excellent care and training. Examples might be: spay or neuter, completion of a Basic Obedience Class, or attainment of a title or award.

Advertising

Neutral

Expect to see some kind of advertising:

- **Local** Classified Ads
- Pet Store Flyers
- Dog Club Ads

Red Lights

- Out of area advertising. There is one exception to this, which is advertising on the Internet - it can't help but be out of area. If you see ads in the

classifieds for out of area breeders or "puppy brokers" (people who will find a pup for you) beware. If breeders are advertising outside their own area that means they are producing enough puppies that they **have to** advertise at a distance. Lots of puppies generally mean poor puppy care.

- Short classified ads. As a rule of thumb you can judge the quality of the litter by the length of the ad. More information means a more informed and responsible breeder.
- Dropping puppy prices. A breeder who has so many pups left over that they are having to drop the price on pups in order to sell didn't go into the breeding very well informed. The best breeders usually have much of the litter sold before it's even bred.
- The biggest red light of all: Breeders who sell through an intermediary like a pet store or a puppy broker. These breeders truly don't care about where their pups wind up or what kinds of situations they go into. If they don't care about the puppies' futures, how much did they care about what they were producing?

Green Lights

Breeders who don't need to advertise. The very best breeders don't need to advertise. They sell puppies by word of mouth. Or other breeders frequent them. Or they have a lot of repeat buyers. If you're lucky enough to find one of these breeders - expect to sit on their waiting list for a while until they have the right pup for you.

And how do you find these breeders? Through word of mouth. Go to dog shows. Go to field events. (Go to the AKC web page at [http://www.akc.org](#) to find a list of your local events.) Basically, beat the bushes until you find a breeder you like and are comfortable with.

Buyer Background Check

Neutral

- Expect to be interviewed.
- Expect to answer a questionnaire.

Red Lights

- Breeders who will sell to anyone walking in the door with their checkbook out. These breeders don't really care about the future of their pups. They'll sell to anyone, any time, who has the money. If the breeder doesn't care where their puppies go - what kind of care did they take in planning the litter? And what kind of care will they give you if your pup has problems?

Green Lights

- Home visits. More difficult when purchasing at a distance, the breeder may be able to arrange to have someone else do the home visit for them.

- References required. Expect those references to be checked. If you have pets now, expect one to be your vet. (Be sure the call your vet and let them know it's OK to answer questions from your potential breeder.)
- Feeling like it's easier to adopt a child than get a puppy out from under this breeder. These breeders are very careful about where their pups go. Their concern is for the future welfare of the pup.

Breeder Background Check

Neutral

Most breeders won't offer this information. But if you ask for it they should unhesitatingly provide it.

- References, their vet and previous buyers
- Clear statement of what they offer to buyers

Red Lights

- Breeders who refuse to provide this information.
- Breeders who can't provide this information.
- Breeders who don't understand why you require this information.

Green Lights

- Breeders who have a prepared sheet or list to give prospective buyers.
- Breeders who have a **written** "mission statement" or set of "breeding goals". These are breeders who have thought long and hard about the direction they want their breeding program to take.

Questions about the litter.

Why was this litter bred?

Neutral

Always, always, always, ask this question. It will give you more insight into who this breeder is and what you can expect from your pup than any other. OK answers are:

- Because this bitch has qualities we wanted to see passed on. (with a list of those qualities)
- Because the dog has qualities we wanted to see passed on. (with a list of those qualities)

Red Lights

Any of these answers:

- To get our money back out of her.
- So the kids could see the miracle of birth.
- To make money.
- So that she'd be "fulfilled" before we spayed her. (Sometimes at an unenlightened vet's recommendation!!)
- Because we thought it would be fun.
- We like her a lot and wanted to keep one of her pups.

All these answers show a lack of forethought and planning. The actual breeding was probably pretty haphazard, as was the care of the pups.

Green Lights

Answers like:

- This breeding furthers my breeding goals. With a detailed explanation of how that is.
- Because we were looking to produce pups with specific qualities. With a detailed explanation of those qualities.

You're looking for any sort of answer that shows forethought, planning, and specific goals for the breeding. This means research was done before the litter was bred.

Picking pups

Neutral

- Expect your breeder to give you some advice when it comes time to pick your pup. After all, no one knows the litter and the individual personalities as well as the breeder.

Red Lights

- Breeders who can give you no insight into the personality of the individual pups. These breeders either don't know what they were looking at, don't care what they were looking at, or didn't pay attention. In general their attitude is that all puppies are alike, so what does it matter.
- Breeders who don't offer any advice about your pick. Their attitude is one of "take the puppy and go."

Green Lights

- Experienced breeders who pick for you. These breeders are confident in their ability to select a pup for you and your situation. And, they have the experience to back it up. (Be sure to ask about a breeder's experience in this area.)

- Experienced breeders who select a pup for you and make a recommendation to that effect, but still leave the final selection in your hands. As above, be sure to ask about their experience in evaluating pups.
- Breeders who have had the litter evaluated by one or more outside persons. Many breeders will do this to verify their own evaluations or to get a more experienced breeder's opinion. Remember however, that these outside evaluators are seeing the pup for only an hour or two. The breeder will still be able to offer a better insight than any outsider.

Lifetime Return Policy

Neutral

- Most breeders do not offer a lifetime return policy. (First Right Of Refusal) However, should you need to place your dog in the future they should make an effort to assist you in finding a home for that dog.

Red Lights

- Breeders who you don't know and can't contact should something go wrong.
- Breeders who don't maintain contact with their buyers so that you can find them should you need assistance.

Green Lights

- Something to the effect of: "If at any time, for any reason, you can no longer care for the dog. It will be returned to the breeder. If you have found another home for the dog the breeder must approve that home before the dog is placed there." These breeders are the best of all. They take their responsibility to their pups seriously. They are doing their best to ensure that no pup of theirs is ever placed in a shelter.
- Do not expect the breeder to buy the dog back. They are simply guaranteeing a good home for the dog should something happen to you

Other valuable information

AKC Registered and Quality

There is a widely held belief that "AKC" or "AKC papers" and quality are one and the same. This is not the case. AKC is a registry body. A registration certificate identifies the dog as the offspring of a known sire and dam, born on a known date. It in no way indicates the quality or state of health of the dog. Quality in the sense of "show quality" is determined by many factors including the dog's health, physical condition, ability to move and appearance. Breeders breeding show stock are trying to produce animals that closely resemble the description of perfection described in the breed standard. Many people breed their dogs with no concern for the qualitative demands of the breed standard. When this occurs repeatedly over several generations, the animals, while still pure-bred, can be of extremely low quality.