

HOW TO FIND A REPUTABLE DOG BREEDER: A NO-NONSENSE GUIDE



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How to Find a Reputable Dog Breeder: A No-Nonsense Guide

Introduction

So you've decided you want a puppy from a breeder? Awesome!

But now comes the tricky part - finding a great breeder.

I've been around thousands of puppies since I started working with dogs in 2007. I've seen the aftermath of both amazing breeders and terrible ones. The difference? Lots of money in vet bills, years of behavioral issues, and a whole lot of heartbreak.

I've had clients tear up in my office because their "purebred" puppy had hip dysplasia at 6 months old, or their dog is so fearful they can't even go for walks. Meanwhile, I have other clients whose breeders still check in on "their" puppies 10 years later and ask for picture updates. That's the difference between a good breeder and a bad one.

This guide is basically me sitting down with you over coffee and telling you exactly what to look for, what questions to ask, and when to run for the hills. Because finding a good breeder isn't just about getting a healthy puppy - it's about supporting people who genuinely care about dogs and are doing things right.

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Section 1: The Non-Negotiable Questions to Ask Every Breeder

Before you fall in love with those puppy photos on their website, you need to ask these questions. Any breeder who gets defensive or dodges these is telling you everything you need to know.

The Health Questions

Ask, "Can I see the health testing results for both parents?"

Don't settle for an answer like, "they've been tested."

You want to see the actual paperwork. For most breeds, this includes hips, elbows, eyes, and breed-specific genetic tests.

Ask them, "what health issues have you seen in your lines?"

Every honest breeder will have an answer because no line is perfect. It's the ones who claim they've never had any issues you need to worry about.

Ask them, "what's your health guarantee?"

Good breeders typically offer 2-year guarantees for genetic conditions. They're that confident in their breeding program.

If you're talking with a first time breeder or a family who had an accidental litter, they won't have any of this information. And that's ok! A lot of great puppies come from families like this, but I want you to be aware that there will be less info and likely no guarantee.

I got my first puppy from a nice family in West Valley City, UT. Their dog escaped the yard one day and got pregnant. Their Labrador met a Pitbull down the street and that's how my first dog Butters came to be. He turned out to be a wonderful dog!



The Puppy Raising Questions

Ask them, "where are the puppies kept?"

The answer better be "in my home" or at least somewhere with tons of human interaction. Puppies raised in kennels or barns often miss crucial steps in their socialization and development. If the breeder neglects the puppies, no amount of love you provide will ever make them completely normal. It's like a human baby who wasn't held or was left to cry for long periods of time, they don't get wired up right and they are likely to have social and behavioral problems for life.

Ask them, "what are you doing to socialize the puppies?"

Good breeders have a whole program - different surfaces, sounds, people, experiences. They should be excited to tell you about it!

Ask them, "can I meet the puppy's parents?"

At minimum, you should meet mom. If dad lives elsewhere, they should have videos and tons of info about him.

Ask them, "how do you decide which puppy goes to which home?"

If they say "first come, first served" or "you can pick any one you want," that's concerning. Good breeders match puppies to families based on temperament and lifestyle.

If you are buying from a family or accidental breeder (often called backyard breeders) then they will likely just let you pick whichever one you want from the pups who haven't been claimed yet. This is all good and well for most dog owners. Many people prefer to let the dog pick them or just go based on feel. If this is how you prefer to pick your next pup I support you 100%. This is exactly how I picked out my first dog Butters.

I do wish I had a professional breeder's advice for helping me pick my first puppy however. Butters was an independent dog, and I was hoping for a cuddly dog. A professional breeder would have been able to guide me. My 2nd dog was very cuddly which more than made up for Butters indifference. I learned a lot from both dogs, but it's good for you to know why great breeders tend to charge a lot for their puppies. There is a lot that goes into it in the form of guidance and puppy raising, they can set everyone up for success.

The Support Questions

Ask them, "what happens if I can't keep the puppy?"

A good breeder will take their puppies back, no questions asked, especially in the first few months. Many will take them back at any age.

Ask them, "will you be available for questions after I take the puppy home?"

The best breeders become lifelong resources. They want updates and photos for years to come!

Ask them, "can I contact people who have puppies from previous litters?"

They should happily connect you with other puppy families.

Section 2: Red Flags That Should Send You Running

These aren't just warning signs - these are "hang up or leave immediately" situations:

The Shipping Scam

If a breeder offers to ship your puppy, RUN. I don't care how convenient it seems or how much you want that specific puppy. Reputable breeders don't ship puppies like Amazon packages.

Shipping is incredibly traumatizing for puppies. They're separated from everything they know, put in a crate, and loaded onto a loud, scary plane with strangers. Any breeder willing to do this to their puppies doesn't actually care about them.

One option that is becoming increasingly common is to pay for a chaperone to fly with your puppy in their lap. This can be a great option. I've had clients who got puppies from breeders who included this service in the puppy fee and others that paid for it themselves. If the handler is reputable and takes great care of the puppy this can be a great way to go.

The "Ready to Go" Red Flags

- If they say, "the puppies can go home at 6 weeks!" RUN away! (Puppies need to stay with mom and littermates until at least 7 weeks, 8 weeks is preferred)
- If they say, "we have puppies available right now!" That is a red flag. (The best breeders have waiting lists. If you're going to pay \$2,000 or more for a puppy you might as well spend it on a great breeder. If they don't have a waiting list and you can't wait to get your puppy that's all fine, but in my opinion you are over paying!)
- If they say, "you can pick any puppy you want from the website!" (This means they don't care about matching, which is another red flag.)
- If they say, "we have lots of different breeds available!" Run for the hills! (That's not a breeder, that's a broker or puppy mill. I would never ever ever get a puppy from a broker or a puppy mill.)

Other Red Flags

- If they say, "we'll meet you halfway" or "we only meet in public for safety" this is a huge red flag. (They're hiding their operation. I've worked with dozens of puppies that get handed off like this to my unsuspecting customers and they have all had at least 1 behavioral or health issue. Usually they need vet help right away due to having a parasite or virus of some sort.)
- If they say, "the mom is at another location" this is a huge red flag.
- If they say, "you can't visit, but I'll send videos" this is not a good breeder. Do not get a puppy from them.

Money Grab Red Flags

- If they are pressuring you to decide quickly, this is a red flag. Great breeders are more worried about the new family being a bad fit for their puppy than they are about getting your money. Trust me, great breeders won't be pressuring you to buy quickly.

I've heard horror stories of dog owners who ignored these red flags because the breeder had a great website and good reviews (it's easy to fake 5 star reviews these days). They ended up with puppies who had parvo, developmental issues, or both! They end up spending thousands of dollars in emergency vet bills and training. If they try to reach out to the "breeder" after the fact, they'll find their breeder's number has been blocked or they get no response.

Section 3: Green Flags That Show You've Found a Gem

When you find these things, you've probably found a breeder worth waiting for:

They Start To Interview YOU

Good breeders are pickier than Harvard admissions. They'll ask about your lifestyle, experience with dogs, work schedule, living situation, and plans for the puppy. If they're not grilling you, they don't care where their puppies end up.

I have heard of breeders who turn down celebrities because they travel too much. If you're going to pay thousands of dollars for a dog, that's the level of dedication you want!

The Forever Home Guarantee

Not only will they take the dog back if needed, but their contract probably requires you to return the dog to them rather than rehoming it yourself. They feel responsible for every puppy they produce for that puppy's entire life.

Health Testing Out the Wazoo

They don't just do the minimum health testing - they go above and beyond. They know the health history of grandparents and great-grandparents. They can talk for hours about why they chose specific pairings to improve the breed.

The Socialization Program

They have a formal puppy development program. They're exposing puppies to different textures, sounds, surfaces, and experiences from 3 days old. They can tell you exactly what each puppy has experienced each week.

They're Part of the Community

They're involved in dog sports, showing, or working their dogs. They're members of breed clubs. Other breeders know and respect them. They're not just breeding pets - they're actively involved in preserving and improving their breed.

The Support System

They have a Facebook group for their puppy families. They host reunions. They check in regularly. They celebrate your dog's achievements like proud grandparents. When you buy from them, you join their extended family.

They're Honest About Everything

They'll tell you why their breed might NOT be right for you. They'll share what health issues they've seen. They'll admit when a puppy might be challenging. They want successful matches, not just sales.

Section 4: How Good Breeders Handle Getting Your Puppy to You

This is super important and tells you everything about a breeder's priorities:

They Make You Come to Them

Good breeders want you to see where your puppy was raised. They want to meet you in person. They want you to meet the parents and see the whole operation. Yes, this might mean a road trip, but it's worth it.

Some of my clients have made picking up their puppy a family adventure - turning it into a mini vacation. The kids still talk about "the day we got Bella" years later. Plus, that car ride home is incredible bonding time with your new puppy.

The Flight Nanny Option

Sometimes a breeder might use a flight nanny who flies with the puppy in the cabin. Remember: this is expensive, should be carefully planned, and the puppy should never be in cargo.

Section 5: The Genetic Guarantee - What It Should Look Like

A good breeder's guarantee tells you everything about their confidence in their breeding program:

What They Should Cover:

- Hip and elbow dysplasia
- Eye conditions
- Heart conditions
- Breed-specific issues

What the Guarantee Should Say

Good breeders typically offer:

- Full refund if you return the puppy
- Partial refund if you keep the puppy
- A replacement puppy from a future litter
- Help with medical bills

The Fine Print That's Actually Good:

Their contract probably requires:

- That you keep the puppy at a healthy weight because obesity voids hip guarantees
- That you don't do high-impact exercise too young
- That you follow their vaccination protocol
- That you feed good [quality food](#)

These rules show how much they care about the puppy's long-term health!

Section 6: The Breeder Interview

Remember, this is a two-way street. You're interviewing them, but they should also be interviewing you.

Questions They Should Ask You:

- Why do you want this specific breed?
- What happened to previous pets?
- Who will be the primary caretaker?
- How many hours will the puppy be alone?
- Do you have a veterinarian?
- Are you planning to train the puppy?
- What are your plans if you can't keep the dog?

If you don't know the answers to these questions, I suggest you answer them now. It's great for you to get clarity on these questions and it'll prepare you for your interview with your future puppy's breeder!

Things That Might Surprise You

Good breeders might:

- Require references (including one from your vet)
- They might want to do a home visit or video tour
- They might have requirements about spay/neuter timing
- They might require you to join their puppy Facebook group
- They might ask you for updates and photos

One breeder I know requires quarterly updates for the first year and annual updates after that. Some people find this intrusive - I think it's beautiful. They genuinely care about every puppy they've brought into this world. Breeders are also looking at how your puppy develops physically and emotionally so they can see how their breeding decisions are playing out over the life of your dog.

Section 7: The Waitlist Reality

Here's something that might frustrate you: good breeders almost always have waitlists. Sometimes long ones.

Why Waitlists Are Actually Good:

- They only breed when they have homes lined up
- They're not churning out puppies for profit
- They can focus on quality over quantity
- They have time to properly raise and socialize each litter

What to Expect:

- Deposits are usually required
- Waitlists can be 6 months to over 2 years
- You might not get a puppy from the first litter

I had a client wait 18 months for a puppy from a specific breeder. Was it annoying? Sure. But that dog is now 12 years old, has had zero health issues, and has a great personality.

Section 8: Trust Your Gut

After working through all of these questions and checks, trust your instincts.

Good Feelings and Good Signs:

- The breeder is someone who seems genuinely passionate about breeding dogs
- They're excited about your interest but not pushy
- Their dogs clearly love them
- The whole setup feels clean

Bad Feeling Signs:

- Something feels "off" even if you can't pinpoint it
- They seem more interested in your money than your lifestyle
- The dogs seem fearful or disconnected

Conclusion

Finding a good breeder takes time, patience, and sometimes a lot of driving. But here's the thing - you're not just buying a puppy. You're:

- Supporting someone who's doing right by dogs
- Getting a puppy with the best possible start in life
- Joining a community of people who love your breed
- Gaining a resource for the life of your dog
- Potentially saving thousands in vet bills and training

The difference between a puppy from a good breeder and a bad one isn't just health and temperament (although those are huge). It's the difference between someone who sees puppies as products and someone who sees them as family members they're entrusting to your care.

And hey, when you do find that perfect breeder and bring home your puppy? [We're here](#) to help make sure they become the amazing dog you're dreaming of!

Need Help Deciding?

Not sure if a breeder is legitimate? Getting weird vibes but can't figure out why? Call us for a FREE 15-minute consultation. We've seen it all and can help you spot red flags or confirm you've found a gem.

After You Bring Your Puppy Home:

Come see us for a [FREE puppy evaluation](#)! Even the best-bred puppy needs proper training and socialization. We'll help you build on that excellent foundation your breeder provided and raise an absolutely amazing dog.

Text "breeder help" to 801-516-4012 or schedule your free consultation at: TrainWalkPoop.com/puppy-training

Remember: A good breeder is just the beginning. Great dogs are born AND made!

**SCAN TO LISTEN TO THIS AS
AN AUDIO BOOK**

