



What to Expect From a Reputable Breeder

When you are searching for a pup (or maybe an older dog) to add to your family, you will no doubt, be a little confused by all of the information in the media. There are campaigns to stop 'puppy farming', stories of scams where people are tricked into paying for puppies that do not exist, and breeders charging thousands and thousands of dollars for 'rare colours' or unusual mixes of breeds.

If you are new to having dogs in your life, it can all be a bit confusing – How can you tell if a breeder is reputable and responsible? What do you need to know to make sure your new friend is as happy and healthy as possible? Who can you trust to give you good advice?

Where can I find a reputable breeder?

When you start looking for a puppy, you will be amazed at the variety of places where pups are listed for sale. Everything from dog-related websites to adverts in the local newspaper, roadside signs, or notices at your local shops.

These days the internet is most people's first port of call, and you will have no doubt used it to research breeds, browse doggy websites, and maybe even find a breeder or two near you. Unfortunately, many unscrupulous breeders, puppy farmers and scammers hide behind glossy, professional looking websites.

If you are looking to find a purebred, pedigreed puppy of a particular breed, the best places to find a reputable breeder is either through the breed's affiliated 'Breed Club' or through a website such as Dogzonline (www.dogzonline.com.au) which only lists breeders that are registered with their Dogs Australia (Australian National Kennel Council) state body.

Important!

The term 'registered breeder' does not give you any guarantees that the breeder is reputable.

You need to ask **WHO** they are registered with and what that actually means. Are their dogs simply registered with the council? Have they 'registered' with the Victorian Pet Exchange Register? Are they simply a paid-up member of an Association or Group? Or they registered with an Association or Controlling Body that enforces a certain set of standards?

Breeders who are members of Dogs Victoria (or the equivalent body in another state) agree to abide by a Code of Ethics, Rules and Regulations. They are subject to inspections and disciplinary proceedings should they be found to be doing the wrong thing.

First contact

Contact via email is now the standard way to make an enquiry, so for many prospective puppy owners, an email to several breeders may be the first step in searching for a puppy. Remember that your enquiry email is a bit like a job interview – first impressions matter!

Although the purchase price of a puppy is an important factor for you to consider when adding a new pet to the family, sending an email with nothing other than 'How much for a puppy?' will not create a good impression.

Reputable breeders will want to know a little bit about you and the home you are offering, along with any experience you may have with this or other breeds. They want to make sure that their puppies go to the right homes and that you and your family and lifestyle are a good match.

A good breeder will encourage you to meet as many individuals of the breed as you can before you commit to a puppy. They will want to make sure you are prepared for the exercise, training and grooming requirements of both the cute, cuddly puppy and the adult dog.

They may suggest that you meet with some adults of the breed if you have not already done so, to ensure that you are aware of the adult size, activity level and temperament of the breed. They should be able to help direct you to a dog show, trial or breed club event where there will be a number of the breed present, or they may invite you to meet their own adult dogs.

If the breeder you have contacted seems only interested in the sale and shows no interest in the home you can provide, or whether the breed is a good match for you and your family, you should probably steer clear!

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You might have to wait

In most cases, a reputable breeder will not have puppies available when you first enquire. They will only plan a breeding when they are sure they have the time to dedicate to rearing the pups, and some only breed when they are looking to keep a pup for themselves.

Many good breeders will have a 'waiting list' of people interested in a puppy from planned or future litters so don't be surprised if you have to wait a little while before a pup might become available.

If the breeder you have contacted seems to have many different litters or puppies to choose from or has puppies of different breeds available, it is unlikely that their priority is providing the one-on-one handling and early socialisation your puppy needs.

Health issues and health testing of breeding stock

All dogs, whether purebred or mixed, can suffer from health problems. Some of these health problems are hereditary, meaning they are passed on to puppies from their parents. Genes that can cause disease are present in all animals – even humans – so be very wary of a breeder who tells you that their particular breed or mix is entirely free from health issues.

A responsible breeder will want to produce happy puppies that live long healthy lives with their new family. They will have studied the health issues that affect their breed and will aim to do everything in their power to minimise the risks of producing puppies with disease.

A reputable breeder will be able to tell you all about the health issues that have been recognised in their breed (or breeds in the case of mixes) and will be able to discuss what health tests are available to help screen potential parents before any breeding occurs.

Some health testing only requires a single test (such as a DNA test), others require yearly or ongoing testing of breeding stock (such as certification relating to heart health and eye conditions).

By screening and carefully selecting breeding animals, breeders can minimise the risk of preventable health problems developing in the puppies they produce.

You will want to make sure that your breeder is undertaking all relevant health testing of their breeding stock prior to selecting the parents of each litter and they should be happy to provide you with copies of the results.

Dogs Victoria has a fact sheet to help you understand Health Testing and how it can be used to prevent disease. Visit our website to learn more.

Producing puppies that are sound in both mind and body

Temperament and behaviour are highly heritable; in fact, it was differences in behaviour and abilities that lead to the development of breeds as we know them today.

Selection of breeding stock with stable, happy temperaments is the first step towards rearing puppies that make great family pets. But it does not stop there.

Behavioural research has identified critical developmental periods early in a puppy's life that can also impact their adult temperament.

Good breeders work hard to make sure that all of the puppies in their litters have the best chances of success in life by providing them with learning opportunities and positive experiences almost from the minute they are born.

Ask your breeder about how they select their breeding stock for temperament, and what kind of handling and socialisation each puppy will receive prior to leaving for its new home. Knowledgeable breeders will have a raft of activities and strategies that they will be happy to discuss with you.





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Can I meet the parents of my puppy?

Meeting the mother of the litter, and if possible, the father will give you a good idea of how your puppy is likely to look and behave as an adult. Because behaviour and temperament are largely heritable, you should avoid puppies from overly timid or anxious parents, and those that show signs of aggression.

It may not be possible to meet the father of your puppy in person – he may live with another breeder, interstate or even overseas. Advanced reproductive technologies allow genetic material to be frozen, transported and stored, meaning a dog can sire a litter without leaving their home country, or even years after they have died.

Visiting the mother and pups

It is usual for breeders to restrict visits in the first few weeks after birth to minimise disruptions that may stress the mother and pups. Once the pups are a bit older, they will usually welcome visits from their puppy buyers, and many good breeders encourage several visits before the puppies head off to their new homes. This not only gives you the opportunity to meet the breeder in person but also allows you to see the conditions in which the breeder houses both their adult animals and the litter.

Pups are usually weaned off their mother's milk and on to solid food from about 3-5 weeks of age. It is at this age that they become more mobile, start to play with each other and begin exploring their environment. This is the beginning of an important period of development, so your breeder will be working hard to ensure that vital socialisation and training opportunities are not being missed and that puppies are having experiences that help them learn.

Meeting and being gently handled by a variety of people is something that puppies need to experience, so breeders are usually happy to have puppy buyers come to visit to help increase the number of people the puppies get to meet.

Pups should be with their mother right through to the time they are ready to move to their new homes (at eight weeks of age) – although the time actually spent in with, or interacting with, the pups will vary from mother to mother. Although they no longer rely on her milk, their mother continues to provide important life lessons right through until the pups leave for their new homes. Any early or forced separation from their mother can potentially cause behaviour issues later in the puppy's life.

A good breeder will be happy to arrange a visit for you to see the mother and the pups, along with where they are housed. Be very wary of breeders who do not allow visits in person, who offer to deliver the pup to you or meet you at a meeting point – these breeders may not want you to see how their animals are kept, or let you see the condition of their adult animals.

Source of knowledge and support

Passionate breeders will have spent countless hours learning everything they can about their breed. Many have been involved in their breed for a long time, so they are an excellent source of information. When you purchase a puppy from a reputable breeder, you should expect ongoing support and advice. They are as anxious as you to have your puppy grow into a loved, life-long companion.

Before you commit to a puppy, make sure that you ask the breeder about what ongoing support and advice they offer. Their interest in the puppy should not end the minute your money hits their bank account.

Reputable breeders will be there for you throughout your puppy's life and feel a responsibility for every puppy they breed. They will not want any puppy they bred ending up in a shelter or pound, and most have a clause in their sale contracts stating that if you can no longer care for your pet (maybe due to a changed domestic situation or serious illness) that they will take the dog back, no matter the age of the dog.

Take your time, do your research and make sure that you are happy you are dealing with a reputable breeder before you commit to purchasing a puppy from them.