



Setting Yourself up for Success as a Breeder

Already you will be beginning to realise that breeding dogs is not for the faint hearted. It is not simply a case of putting the dog and bitch in together and having a litter of pups. There is a considerable commitment involved, one that involves time, resources, and sacrifices. You will be responsible for the puppies you bring into the world, and this responsibility will continue throughout their lives – well past the time they leave for their new homes.

Breeding is a science and an art. Your decisions and your choices will influence the lives of all the puppies that you produce. This is a big responsibility. You want to be producing puppies that are happy, healthy and well adjusted.

As you select homes for your puppies, you will want to be looking for them to be loved and cared for in the same manner that you care for your own pets, with owners who are knowledgeable and committed.

On top of this, you will undoubtedly have aspirations in regards to producing pups that are true to their breed standard in both their physical appearance, conformation and temperament. You should have a definite goal that you are trying to achieve with each breeding – maybe it is to produce pups who excel in the show ring, maybe your focus is on working ability or temperament, or perhaps you are trying to improve the health of the breed by moving away from an emerging problem.

Whatever your plans are, you need to aspire to be the best that you can.

So what makes a good breeder?

The very best breeders are continually learning, questioning and thinking about how they could do better. Whether they have only had a few litters, or have been breeding dogs for decades, successful breeders never stop striving for improvement.

Good breeders know their breed inside out. They have read and reread the breed standard, have studied bloodlines and kennels from around the world, and have a definite opinion of what the breed should be. They will be aware of all of the breed's potential health problems and understand how these problems can be eradicated or minimised with their breeding choices.

They are genuinely concerned for the welfare of the breed and the puppies they produce.

These are the breeders that are ruthless in regards to producing healthy, happy pups. They will not compromise at any point – from the selection of breeding stock, their preventative health care, nutrition, to the rearing of their pups – nothing will be left undone, and no corners will be cut.

The very best breeders are those that are critical of everything that they do. After each litter, they look at what they produced and work on ways they could improve next time. They surround themselves with like minded people and learn from the advice given by those they respect.

Successful breeders strive to do the best they can; they are not influenced by personalities or cliques within their breed – they simply aim to choose the best dog and the best bitch possible to achieve their goals.

Starting out as a breeder

As you are starting out as a breeder, you can see that you will have a lot to learn. Not only do you need to understand all about anatomy and reproduction, but you also have to learn what makes a healthy and sound example of your breed.

Probably the best advice to any new breeder is not to rush into breeding that first litter. Instead, take the time to really familiarise yourself with your chosen breed. That way, when it comes time to breed your litter, you will have a much better idea of what you are hoping to achieve, and how to avoid common mistakes that new breeders may make.

You will want to go to shows, visit other breeders and attend breed club events. If your breed was bred for a specific task or role, you should try to see them 'doing their job' as this will then help you understand why they are the way they are. You want to meet as many individuals of your breed as possible – both show dogs, working dogs and pets.

You should take the opportunity to talk to their owners about what they like and what they would change about their dogs and ask about any health issues they have encountered.



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Know your breed standard

Next, you need to study the 'Breed Standard' for your breed, and if one exists, the 'Breed Standard Extension'.

The breed standard is the accepted 'blueprint' of the perfect example of your breed. It is what judges use to assess the individual animals presented to them in the show ring.

The breed standard will often contain some history about the origins and purpose of the breed along with the characteristics and temperament expected. Then there is a description of the shape and size of the overall dog as well as the relative shape and size of eyes, ears, head, body, tail and legs and feet. It lists how the dog should look both standing and when on the move, and lists the type and texture of the coat along with allowable colours.

Many of these breed features were important because they were directly linked to the dog's ability to perform the function it was bred for and ensured that the dog was sound and fit to work.

Many breeds also have a 'Breed Standard Extension' which is a document written by breeders and breed experts to explain the standard further. The Breed Standard Extension helps to clarify areas of the standard that may not be easy to understand, and often contains illustrations to help readers understand what the standard is referring to.

The Dogs Australia website hosts the current accepted Australian standard for every breed that is registerable in Australia. You can find them at dogsaustralia.org.au/members/Breed/index

Where there is an approved Breed Standard Extension, it will be able to be downloaded from the breed page on the Dogs Australia site.

Learn as much as you can

Talk to breeders, judges and owners. Attend seminars, read books, visit breed club websites, and watch videos.

These days breeders have access to a fantastic amount of information in all kinds of formats from hardcopy books and magazines to virtual seminars, podcasts and educational videos from leading experts worldwide.

You can watch litters being born, join an online discussion group, access breeder resources from kennel clubs around the world, and even attend breeder seminars from the comfort of your own home.

Learn about the history of your breed, its development, and how it performs the task it was bred for. Look at examples of the breed from around the world and research information on possible health issues and the tests that can be used to prevent them.

The more you know before you begin breeding, the better.

A good breeder never stops learning!





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Find yourself a good mentor

Mentors can help you with all the knowledge and information that you might not be able to find in a book. Mentors can come from within your breed or from other breeds, and you should actively seek out people who you trust and admire, who have been successful with their own dogs over many years.

A good mentor will be happy to discuss all aspects of breeding, whelping, rearing and caring for a litter, and will be keen to see you succeed and develop your skills. They will be able to help and guide you towards the selection of suitable breeding stock and be honest with you about your bitch's virtues and flaws. They will be able to help you source items you might need, or direct you to professionals who can assist you along the way.

For many new breeders starting out, their first mentor will be the breeder of their bitch. Your breeder will have been the person you turned to with questions relating to your own dog as it was growing, and may be the person who sparked the idea and encouraged you to breed a litter. They are usually a great source of knowledge having been involved in the breed for some time, and having whelped and raised many litters.

If they are located nearby, your mentor may also be able to offer you the opportunity to experience breeding, whelping and raising a litter before you commit to doing it yourself – letting you sit with them as they whelp a litter, and have you assist with caring for the pups. This is a great way to find out if breeding really is for you as you will see the amount of work that goes into rearing a litter of pups.

When it comes time to breed your own litter, they may be able to come and sit with you, be there to answer your questions, or help you with any problems you might encounter.

A good mentor is worth their weight in gold!

Develop a good relationship with your Vet

Developing a good relationship with your vet is essential if you plan to breed. They are not only a great source of advice but will be heavily involved in your breeding program in the way of health checks, vaccinations, microchipping, general care of both adults and puppies and assisting if things go wrong.

They are also the ones that you are going to call in the middle of the night or on a weekend when your bitch is having trouble whelping – so having a good relationship with them is important!

You should discuss your breeding plans with your vet well before it comes time for a mating to occur. They will be able to help advise you about breed specific health issues, health testing, and how to make sure your bitch is in tip top shape prior to being mated. They will also have to sign off that your bitch has reached adequate maturity and is suitable for breeding.

Note:

Although all vets receive training in reproduction, those that are actually breeders themselves may be able to offer a more experienced view.

They will have had significantly more exposure to 'normal' whelpings and hands on puppy rearing than vets whose experience is largely dealing with the mother or pups when things go wrong.

You might want to ask at your regular clinic if any of the veterinarians on staff have a particular interest in breeding and reproduction, or are breeders themselves.