



DOGS
VICTORIA
YOUR CANINE COMMUNITY

Dogs Victoria Breeder Series - Breeder Education Package 3rd Edition

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Section 1

Getting Started

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Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Are you ready to become a breeder?

Breeding dogs is something that many people consider doing, but it comes with quite a bit of responsibility, long hours, and considerable expense. You can expect moments of joy, life long friendships, tears and heartache along the way – it certainly is not for the faint hearted!

To do it well you need to have an excellent understanding of the physiology of the dog, comprehensive knowledge of genetics, breeding, and breeding strategies, as well as the time and resources to put into nurturing a litter of puppies so that they can develop to their full potential.

You also need to have facilities that meet or exceed the minimum standards set out by the Victorian Government and an understanding of the laws that apply to dog breeders in this state. Dog breeding has become very highly regulated. It is no longer just a case of having a litter and putting a 'puppies for sale' sign on your front gate.

Before you start planning your first litter, you want to make sure that you understand what is involved. Remember you will have a life long responsibility for the puppies you produce, so you will need to do everything in your power to make sure that those puppies have every chance of having a long, healthy and happy life.

Am I ready to become a breeder?

Before you rush into breeding, you need to take time to consider if breeding dogs is really for you. Statistics show that a large number of breeders only ever have a single litter. When asked why, most will tell you they did not truly realise the amount of time, effort and cost involved.



Do you have the TIME?

Breeding and raising pups takes a considerable amount of time. When you have a litter, you should expect to spend a good part of every day cleaning, feeding, supervising, handling, and socialising your pups and their mother.

During the birth, you may have to stay awake through the night to supervise, and for the first few days, you will need to be checking on the litter constantly. Many breeders end up sleeping next to the litter for the first week so they can supervise through the night. Is this something that you are prepared for?

From the birth through to the day the puppies leave for their new homes you can expect to spend 3 to 4 hours (maybe more) every day cleaning out the whelping area, washing bedding, supervising, feeding, handling the pups, and providing enrichment, exercise and socialisation opportunities. A litter takes up a HUGE amount of time!

If you work, you may have to consider taking some time off so that you can properly care for the litter – can you afford to do this? Do you have family members who can assist you with the care of the litter? Are you prepared to put the rest of your life on hold for 2 to 3 months to have a litter?

If things do not go to plan, will you be able to devote even more time for additional care – for example, if your pups need bottle feeding every 2 to 3 hours?

Do you have the RESOURCES?

Although many people think breeding dogs is a way to make money, in reality, most breeders who do it properly struggle to break even. All of the costs associated with breeding and raising a litter come well before your first puppy sale, so you need to make sure you have the resources to do it well.

Before you even start thinking about a litter, there are the costs associated with pre-breeding health testing, veterinary care, preventative treatments, and nutrition to make sure the parents of the litter are as healthy as possible prior to the mating. Then there is the stud fee and any costs associated with obtaining a successful conception.

Even if everything goes to plan, and you have a large, healthy litter, there are the costs of feeding good quality food to a lactating bitch and growing pups, supplementing, worming, vaccinating, microchipping and other preventative health treatments. Then there are the costs of registration, record keeping and preparing documentation and puppy packs.

Consider that you may need to purchase a whelping box, additional bedding, bowls, utensils, toys and other enrichment items. There are also the costs associated with heating (and potentially cooling) the whelping area, and depending on your home or property set up, a variety of other expenses to make sure your litter is kept warm, safe and clean right through to when the pups head to their new homes.

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Are you ready to become a breeder?

And then there are the costs involved if things don't go to plan or if the mother or pups get sick. An out of hours emergency caesarean can easily cost \$3,000-\$4,000. Are you prepared for these extra costs?

Do you have the FACILITIES?

With dog breeding having been in the media spotlight in recent times, the Victorian State Government and Local Councils have become increasingly focused on members of the community who breed dogs. There have been several changes to legislation with the aims of stamping out 'Puppy Farms' and unscrupulous breeders.

Before you consider breeding a litter, you need to make sure that you are actually able to legally undertake breeding activities at your premises. Every property within Victoria is 'zoned' under the Victorian State planning scheme. The breeding of dogs and cats is only permitted in certain zones, so you will need to check well ahead of time.

You also need to decide if your premises are suitable for whelping and raising a litter. Although suburban homes and backyards may be adequate for small breeds or small litters, it is unlikely that you will have the space to be able to cope with a litter of ten or more seven week old large breed puppies without upsetting your neighbours.

Do you have adequate facilities for a whelping area? As the pups get older, do you have somewhere to house them that allows access to outside? Will you need to modify your fencing to house a litter safely? Can you keep the mother and litter safe from other pets and inquisitive children?

You will also need to make sure that all of your dogs are registered with your council and that you do not exceed your permitted numbers of dogs – both before and after the litter (especially if you are planning to keep a puppy). All pups must be registered with your local council by the time they reach 12 weeks of age and will count towards your total permitted number of dogs.

Breeding with Dogs Victoria

If you are thinking about breeding purebred dogs, Dogs Victoria would like to welcome you and help you learn everything you need to know to be a responsible breeder. Dogs Victoria acts as the registry for all purebred, pedigree dogs in Victoria, and is the state controlling body for Dogs Australia (previously the Australian National Kennel Council or ANKC). Dogs Australia is the internationally recognised body aligned with other purebred registries around the world.

Dogs Victoria registered breeders are committed to preserving the unique heritage of their chosen breeds. They do this through careful selection of breeding stock, comprehensive health testing and screening for known breed conditions, and maintenance of genetic diversity through sharing of genetic material with like minded breeders from around the country and around the world.

Note:

In 2021, the Australian National Kennel Council changed its trading name to 'Dogs Australia' to better reflect their role as the national body for purebred dogs.

Given that this is a fairly recent change, you may find that you encounter dog breeders and older breeder-related documents that still reference 'the ANKC', the 'ANKC Rules and Regulations', and the 'ANKC website'. It is important to note that 'Dogs Australia' and 'ANKC' are the same organisation.

You can visit the Dogs Australia website at: www.dogsaustralia.org.au

Dogs Victoria registered breeders aim to produce healthy, happy puppies that are true to their breed standard in physical appearance and temperament, fit for the purpose they were originally bred for. They have a driving passion for preserving and improving the breed they love so that others can enjoy the unique characteristics that make the breed special.



Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Becoming a Dogs Victoria breeder

So you think you want to breed purebred, pedigree dogs?

If you are thinking about breeding purebred dogs, Dogs Victoria would like to welcome you and help you learn everything you need to know to become a responsible breeder.

Dogs Victoria aims to promote best practice within the dog breeding community and has been recognised as the peak body for purebred dogs in this state.

Breeders who hold a current Dogs Victoria 'Breeder's Prefix' are granted some very special exemptions by the Victorian Government, so it is important that you are committed to meeting or exceeding all of the requirements expected of a prefix holder. This includes adhering to all of the Dogs Victoria Rules, Regulations, and Codes of Practice, in addition to the Local Council and State Government requirements that apply to all breeders in Victoria.

Dogs Victoria breeders are classed as 'Recreational Breeders' by the Victorian Government. This sets our breeders apart from backyard hobby breeders (called 'micro' breeders) and large scale 'commercial' breeders.

Dogs Victoria aims to have breeders who always have their dog's welfare and best interests at heart, who make considered breeding choices, and who understand the importance of doing things well. Breeders who are always striving to produce healthy, happy, puppies that are true to their breed standard in physical appearance and temperament, fit for the purpose they were originally bred for.

What is a pedigree purebred dog?

A '**purebred**' dog is one whose mother and father are both of the same breed.

A '**pedigree**' represents a known family tree going back many generations. Pedigree 'papers' will usually show a three generation family tree for that individual animal.

To be a '**pedigree purebred**' dog, both the mother and the father of the litter must be the same breed, AND both must be registered with Dogs Australia (or the equivalent register in another country such as the Kennel Club in the UK, or the American Kennel Club in the USA).

All dogs in the pedigree, going back many generations, will have been registered purebred animals of the same breed.

Dogs Australia recognises over 200 different breeds of dog and has 'Member Bodies' in each state who are responsible for registering breeders and for registering litters of puppies. In Victoria, this is Dogs Victoria.

If you are planning on breeding with Dogs Victoria, your breeding female will need to be a registered purebred.

*She should have Dogs Australia pedigree 'papers' and be on the **Main Register** (blue coloured papers). She must be registered in your name with Dogs Victoria.*

*If she is a cross breed or mixed breed, is purebred but does not have papers, or if she is pedigree purebred but registered on the **Limited Register** (orange coloured papers), you will not be able to breed her and register your litter with Dogs Victoria.*

Note: More information on eligibility for breeding, the selection of breeding stock, and health testing of breeding animals is covered in the 'Breeding Basics' section of our Breeder Education Booklet.

So what is a 'breeder prefix'?

If you want to breed purebred pups with pedigree papers, you will need to apply for and be granted a 'breeder's prefix' **BEFORE** you begin breeding.

In a nutshell, a breeder's prefix is a 'Registered Kennel Name'. It is a bit like a business name and a breeder's license all rolled into one.

Across Australia, every breeder who is registered with one of Dogs Australia's state member bodies (such as Dogs Victoria) will have been granted a unique prefix – no two prefixes can be the same!

Every time you register a purebred litter, your 'Prefix' forms part of each puppy's official pedigree name – making it easy for people to know who bred the litter.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 4.1.5.7

*No dog shall be registered or litter recorded unless the breeder has registered a stud prefix **prior to undertaking the breeding** and this prefix shall be the only prefix permitted in the full name of the dog.*

Dogs Victoria Regulation 4.2.2

*A member who wishes to breed must register a Prefix **prior to undertaking a breeding**.*

Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Becoming a Dogs Victoria breeder

How do I qualify for a 'breeder prefix'?

Because breeding dogs comes with responsibilities and obligations, there is a requirement for all new breeders to undergo some education and assessment before they can qualify for a Dogs Victoria Breeder's Prefix.

There is also a **minimum membership period of 12 months** before you can apply.

The minimum membership period was put in place to encourage new members who are thinking of moving into breeding to get involved in the various dog related activities offered by Dogs Victoria and to give them time to learn more about their chosen breed and what it was bred to do BEFORE breeding their first litter.

This involvement may be through breed club activities, conformation shows, or one of the many other dog related disciplines/sports. Attending events allows you to meet other breeders, see your breed in action, and allows you to learn more about breeding. The more examples of the breed you meet, the better you will come to understand what constitutes an excellent example of your chosen breed – both mentally and physically.

The breeder education component aims to ensure that, as a breeder, you understand your obligations under the relevant pieces of legislation that apply to breeders, have the knowledge to make considered breeding choices, and understand what is involved in whelping and raising a litter of pups.

This breeder education package consists of nearly 30 smaller units covering everything from Codes of Practice to the various developmental stages of puppies, from basic genetics and health testing through to preparing your puppies for their new homes. It is aimed at new breeders who may have little or no experience and provides an ongoing point of reference throughout your breeding career.

Once you have read through all of the breeder education package material, you will be asked to complete a short examination on the information that it contains. This helps Dogs Victoria ensure that you have taken the time to become familiar with the requirements and that you are ready to start thinking about breeding a litter.

Once you have successfully passed the Breeder Education Assessment and completed the minimum of 12 months as a Dogs Victoria member, you can apply for your Breeder Prefix.

You will be required to nominate a list of choices for your preferred prefix and pay a fee. It is suggested that you select at **least** seven or eight options (the more the better) because some of your choices may already be taken, or there may be similar prefixes already registered.

Your preferred prefixes will be assessed by the National Registry, rather than Dogs Victoria, so this part of the process can take a few weeks.

Prefix selections must meet the following criteria:

- » *Be a single word consisting of between 4-12 letters*
- » *Must not include numbers, either as numerals or words*
- » *Must not include apostrophes, hyphens or punctuation marks of any kind*
- » *Must not include the word 'Kennel'*
- » *Must not be similar or the same as another prefix already registered in Australia or overseas, which could be deemed to cause misunderstanding or confusion*
- » *Must not incorporate the full name of any breed of dog*
- » *Must not include a full first or surname*
- » *Must not be a notable person*
- » *Must not be a place or country*
- » *Must not be a registered business name, interstate or overseas*
- » *Must not be a brand*
- » *Must not be deemed offensive*
- » *Must not be a common dog name, being where five or more dog names are already registered on the ANKC database*

Although the requirements might seem a bit daunting at first, along the way, you will meet a host of other breeders who have the same passion for their breed as you do, and who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise. Many will have had years (even decades) of experience; they will have seen both the highs and lows of breeding dogs and will be happy to provide advice and support to help you have success with your own breeding endeavours.

If you have any questions in regards to becoming a Dogs Victoria Member or obtaining a Dogs Victoria Breeder's Prefix, please contact our Member Experience Team on 03 9788 2500

Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Local Council requirements for dog breeders

Understanding your obligations as a dog owner can be very confusing. Most people are aware that they need to register their dogs and cats with their local council, but when it comes to the various types of permits, there is often a lot of misunderstanding as to what is required.

The rules relating to the keeping of dogs fall under several different pieces of legislation in Victoria, all of which are overseen by various local council departments. With 79 different councils across the state of Victoria, the interpretation and enforcement of the rules can vary widely from area to area.

If you plan on becoming a breeder, then some additional rules will apply to you – different from those that affect regular pet dog owners. The Victorian Government has relatively strict laws relating to dog breeding in the attempt to stamp out ‘puppy farms’ and those breeders who do not provide proper conditions for their breeding animals.

Luckily, breeders registered with Dogs Victoria are entitled to exemptions from certain sections of the state legislation due to their membership of an Applicable Organisation. These exemptions come with the expectation that Dogs Victoria holds its members to a higher standard, and that members who fail to meet these standards will be held to account under Dogs Victoria’s disciplinary framework.

Note:

Dogs Victoria breeder members (those that hold a Breeder’s Prefix) are classified as ‘Recreational Breeders’ by the State Government.

This sets them aside from ‘Micro breeders’ (those who only have one or two fertile females) and ‘Commercial Breeding Businesses’ (those that have 10 or more fertile females and breed dogs for a business).

Registering your animals

All dogs and cats over the age of 3 months are required, by law, to be registered with their local council. Registration runs from the 10th April each year, and you will need to pay a fee each year to keep your pet’s registration current.

Important!

*Dogs Victoria members and Dogs Victoria breeders are NOT exempt from this requirement. **You must register your dogs with your Local Council.***

However, you may be eligible for reduced registration fees if your dog is not desexed, and you will be exempt from any mandatory desexing requirements your council may have imposed.

Each year as you renew your dog’s registration, you will have to provide proof of current membership, and also provide a copy of your dog’s pedigree papers to be eligible for the discounted fee.

The rules relating to the registration of dogs and cats form ‘Part 2’ of the [Domestic Animals Act 1994](#).

This piece of legislation outlines the process for registration, the setting of fees, and requirements for microchipping and identification. It also gives individual councils the right to impose mandatory desexing requirements and outlines those animals that may be exempt from this requirement.

The *Domestic Animals Act* gives councils the powers to impound animals, have them declared ‘Dangerous’ or ‘Menacing’, and register Domestic Animal Businesses within their municipality.

Council Authorised Officers are also entitled to enter your property for the purposes of enforcing the **Act** and can impose fines for people who fail to comply with any of the registration requirements.

Your local council is also obliged to develop a ‘**Domestic Animal Management Plan**’ every four years that outlines how they plan to manage domestic animals, encourage responsible pet ownership, and how they plan to enforce the laws.

Information about registration requirements for your council and a copy of your council’s Domestic Animal Management Plan will be available in the ‘pets’ or ‘animals’ section of your Local Council’s website.

How many dogs can I have?

If you are considering breeding, it is likely that you already have one or two dogs.

Before you make plans to have a litter and potentially keep a pup or two for yourself, you need to know what your permitted dog numbers are so you do not exceed your limit.

Dogs Victoria members live all over the state of Victoria – from inner city apartments to large farming properties in rural areas making it impossible to give a single answer to the question ‘*How many dogs can I have at my premises?*’.

A large proportion of our members live on small acreage, hobby farm type properties located around the metropolitan fringe. The appeal of this type of property is having a bit more space and being able to have a few more dogs. This makes it ideal for members who want to breed and raise a litter or keep several dogs to train and compete with.

Unfortunately, you need to do your homework before moving, as some zonings in these hobby farm type areas are no better than living in suburbia with regards to permitted numbers of pets.

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Local Council requirements for dog breeders

Understanding planning schemes and zoning of properties

The 'Victorian Planning Scheme' (which falls under the [Planning and Environment \(Planning Schemes\) Act 1996](#)) is a comprehensive state wide guide to different 'zones' and what activities can and cannot be undertaken on land within those zones.

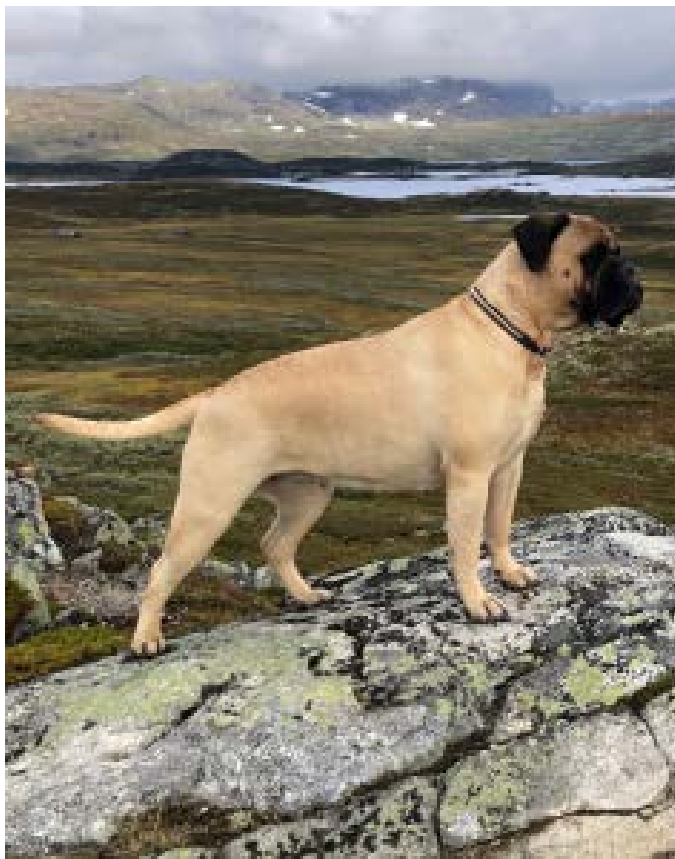
Depending on the zoning of your property, there will be things you are 'allowed to do', things that you 'might be allowed to do with a permit', and things you are 'not permitted' to do.

Individual Councils can then have a 'planning overlay' that they apply within their municipal area that further restricts use or Local Laws that override specific uses, and there can be caveats or covenants over particular properties.

It can be very confusing....

An excellent first step is to find out what zoning applies to your property (or, if you are thinking of moving, the zoning of any property you plan to buy/lease).

This information can be freely accessed for any Victorian address via the www.planning.vic.gov.au website.



You simply 'Search for a Planning Report', by entering the address of the property of interest.

It will then give you all of the information regarding the zoning and overlays that apply to that property and links through to more information about the rules that apply to that zoning type.

Important!

If you plan on breeding dogs, you will need to reside in an area that allows for 'Domestic Animal Husbandry'.

There are some zones where 'Domestic Animal Keeping' is permitted, but 'Domestic Animal Husbandry' requires a permit, others where Domestic Animal Husbandry is a permitted activity.

Council information

The information provided on the www.planning.vic.gov.au site will also list the name of the council in which the property is located. So the next step is to visit that council's website for more information on Local Laws and pet ownership.

Most council websites will have very clear information about pet ownership. Most have a 'Pets and Animals' section, and this will list how many pets, of which type (cats, poultry, birds, rabbits, livestock etc.) you are allowed to keep without a permit.

Merri-bek City Council (Inner North) website states:

If you live in a flat, unit, apartment or townhouse you are allowed one dog, all other premises; you are allowed two dogs without an excess animal permit.

Casey City Council (South West) website states:

If your property is less than 1 acre, you are allowed two dogs, and if your property is over 4 acres, you are allowed four dogs without an excess animal permit.

Murrindindi Shire Council (Central Victoria) website states:

If you live on residential land, you are allowed two dogs, and on rural land, you may have up to five dogs without an excess animal permit.

Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Local Council requirements for dog breeders

Excess animal permits/local laws permits

If you want to keep more dogs (or other pets) than the baseline allowed for your property, you will need to apply for an excess animal permit. Applications for this type of permit involve completing a form and may trigger a visit from your Council's Local Laws Officer.

Many councils are reluctant to grant excess animal permits in built up areas due to the risk of impacts on the rest of the community. As each application is reviewed, they will take into account your dog registration history, any barking or other complaints received from your neighbours, and any occurrences where your dogs have caused nuisance or escaped your premises.

If granted an excess animal permit, you will need to pay a fee, and, in most Councils, the permit will need to be renewed each year. All animals covered by the permit will need to be registered.

Planning permits and dog breeding

Planning Permits are different from excess animal permits because they relate to the **activities** that can be conducted on a particular property.

Within the Victorian Planning Provisions (73.03) there is a definition of land use terms including 'Domestic Animal Husbandry' which is defined as 'Land used to keep, breed, board or train domestic animals'.

Unless 'Domestic Animal Husbandry' is listed explicitly in the permitted activities in your zoning rules, you will need to apply for a planning permit to undertake this activity. If it is a prohibited use, you will not be able to do it.

In the past, many councils did not stringently enforce this planning permission requirement unless the breeding was of a commercial scale. With increasing legislation relating to the breeding of dogs and cats, it is becoming a requirement that our members are having to address with their councils, and in many cases, are finding difficult.

Applying for a planning permit is both complicated and costly. Some councils are reluctant to allow breeding of dogs given the media focus on puppy farms and the large amount of legislation they have to enforce. They want to make sure they tick every box, and some are asking for independent environmental impact assessments, including sound/noise reports.

For a small scale, recreational breeder, this can make things seem all too hard and the cost of applying for the permit more than they could ever hope to recover through breeding a few litters.

Can Dogs Victoria assist members with their local council requirements?

Dogs Victoria continually lobbies Government for fair, simple and enforceable regulation of Dog Breeders across the state. Its members qualify for some exemptions due to its status as an Applicable Organisation as defined under the **Domestic Animals Act**.

The Dogs Victoria Compliance team can provide some simple advice, but given the complexity of the matter, every member's situation may be different. Make sure you take the time to investigate the zoning of your property and have a thorough read of the council's website before doing anything.

Because different Council departments are dealing with varying pieces of legislation, you may get conflicting advice or information depending on whether you speak to Local Laws or Planning Departments. If you call your council, the reception staff may not know who is best to answer your questions, so try to make sure that you ask to speak to the right department.

Our advice is to make sure that any contact you have with your Local Council is documented. Make a note of the date, the name of the person you spoke with, and the department in which they work. Where possible, ask them to send any information or advice in writing/by email. That way, if there is a staff change, or you are referred across to a different department, you have something solid to work off.

Important!

*BEFORE you decide that dog breeding is something you want to undertake, you will need to make sure that your dog breeding plans are not going to place you in a position where you are breaking the law. Offences under both the **Domestic Animals Act** and the **Planning and Environment Act** carry significant fines and may result in costly court proceedings.*



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Pet Exchange Register and Source Numbers

Recent anti-puppy farming legislation changes have seen the introduction of a 'Pet Exchange Register' in Victoria.

This Victorian State Government register aims to provide 'increased traceability' and to make it 'easier for prospective buyers to know that their pet has come from a valid source.'

The Pet Exchange Register uses '**Source Numbers**' to register anyone who is involved in supplying dogs and cats to families or individuals – this includes shelters and pounds, foster carers, commercial breeding establishments, pet shops or small scale/hobby breeders.

How is the Pet Exchange Register meant to work?

It is now a legal requirement that all advertisements in Victoria for dogs and cats, puppies and kittens, include a valid Source Number as well as the microchip number of the animal being sold or given away.

Potential pet owners can visit the [Pet Exchange Register Website](#) and check that the Source Number they have been quoted is valid, and the details match the person they are dealing with.

They simply enter the number into the search area on the Pet Exchange Register Website and the details associated with the source number are displayed.

Note: The default information displayed for recreational breeders includes the municipality in which you are registered and your Dogs Victoria membership number, but you can choose to have more information displayed if you would like.

Potential purchasers who find advertisements with no Source Number, or an invalid one, are encouraged to report them to the Pet Exchange Register for investigation.

The Victorian Government has committed significant resources to policing of compliance in this area.

Important!

Regular Dogs Victoria members **do not qualify** for a Source number as a Recreational Breeder.

Only Dogs Victoria breeder members who have a current, financial Breeder's Prefix are classified as 'Recreational Breeders'.

This sets them aside from 'Micro breeders' (those who only have one or two fertile females), Domestic Breeding Businesses (people with between 2-10 fertile females who are not a member of an Applicable Organisation) and 'Commercial Breeding Businesses' (those breeders with 10 or more fertile females that have been approved by the Minister to breed at a commercial scale).

What is a Source Number and how do I get one?

Source Numbers are issued by the Pet Exchange Register, which is part of Animal Welfare Victoria. Animal Welfare Victoria is currently part of the Agriculture sector of the Victorian Government's Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

Registering for a Source Number is easy and can be completed online through the [Pet Exchange Register](#) website. Those who do not have internet access can contact the Pet Exchange Register for a hard copy form.

The Source Number is valid for one year and needs to be renewed annually. Although they were initially free of charge, since July 2021, there is a fee to pay when you apply for or renew your Source Number.

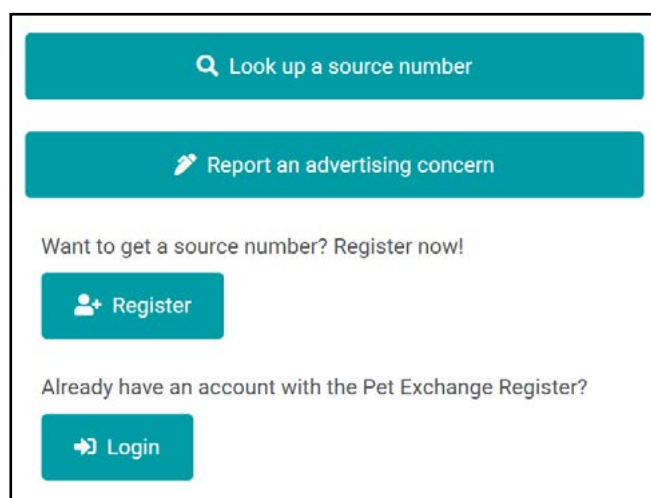
You are able to let your Source Number lapse, and reactivate it when needed, but it must be valid at the time that you have a litter or are advertising dogs or puppies for sale or give away (including rehoming older pups/dogs).

The Source Number itself consists of two letters and six digits.

The letters indicate the category of the supplier – in the case of Dogs Victoria registered breeders the letters are 'RB' – Recreational Breeder.

Micro breeders, commercial breeders, foster carers, and shelters are also required to have a source number, however theirs will begin with a different set of letters – i.e. 'MB' for Microbreeder, 'FC' for foster carer.

The numbers are a unique identifier for the individual breeder.



The screenshot shows a teal navigation bar with two main buttons: "Look up a source number" (with a magnifying glass icon) and "Report an advertising concern" (with a hand icon). Below the navigation bar, there is a text prompt: "Want to get a source number? Register now!" followed by a teal button with a person icon and the text "Register". Below that, there is another text prompt: "Already have an account with the Pet Exchange Register?" followed by a teal button with a right-pointing arrow icon and the text "Login".

Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Pet Exchange Register and Source Numbers

When is a Source Number required?

When the Pet Exchange Register was first established, a Source Number was only required when you were advertising puppies for sale. For many Dogs Victoria breeders who already had waiting lists for puppies, there was no need to apply for one.

However, on the 1st July 2020 the rules changed, and now all Dogs Victoria breeders who are actively breeding need to have a valid number.

This is because it is now a requirement that a valid Source Number is provided at the time of microchipping any dog or cat in the state of Victoria. The Source Number forms part of the 'Prescribed Information' that MUST be included on the microchipping form.

Important!

Your veterinarian will need you to provide your Source Number to complete the microchip registration form that is sent to the accredited database at the time of chipping your puppies, so you will need to have one by the time your pups are ready to be chipped – usually at six weeks of age.

Advertising your puppies or older dogs

All Victorian advertisements for puppies or kittens, adult dogs or cats, need to have **both** the animal's unique microchip number AND the Source Number listed.

This applies whether you are selling or giving them away.

It is an offence if you do not provide these details in an advertisement, meaning both you and the place hosting or publishing the advertisement (such as an online provider or newspaper) can be fined if these numbers are not displayed.

This includes pups listed for sale through Breed Club websites or newsletters, so clubs need to be aware that they must enforce the requirement. It also includes advertisements on national pure-bred dog websites such as Dogzonline and Dogdom.

Important!

If you advertise your puppies or older dogs for sale or placement into pet homes (regardless of if you are giving them away or charging), you will need to list your Source Number, along with their individual microchip numbers.

When do I NOT need to list a Source Number?

There are instances where you are NOT required to have or publish a Source Number –

- » If you are simply advertising that you are a breeder, you do not have to list your Source Number.

Examples of Breeder Advertising might include:

Your own 'Kennel' website - where you provide information about your dogs, the breed, your show wins etc.

Advertising in a Breed Club catalogue, newsletter or website 'Breeder Listing' where you are promoting your Breeder Prefix and your dogs

- » If you are advertising a planned litter, or a litter that is 'on the way' (not yet born), you are not required to list your Source Number.

However **as soon as the pups are born**, you are required to list BOTH your source number and the unique microchips of each pup - as it is considered advertising an animal for sale.

This poses a dilemma as puppies are generally not microchipped until the time of their first vaccination at 6 weeks of age.

Of course if you choose to include your Source Number voluntarily in these instances, that is OK - just make sure that your Source Number is current/valid.



Dogs Victoria Breeder Series

Pet Exchange Register and Source Numbers

So how do I register?

Registering for a Source Number is relatively simple, but you will need to make sure you have all of the required information handy before logging on.

Once you have been granted your Breeder's Prefix, you can go to the [Pet Exchange Register](#) site and select 'Register Now'.

Important!

Regular/General members of Dogs Victoria are NOT eligible for a 'Recreational Breeder' Source Number – only holders of a current/financial Breeder's Prefix qualify.

Simply having a Dogs Victoria Membership number does not make you a Dogs Victoria 'Breeder'.

Dogs Victoria is required to report monthly to the Pet Exchange Register any lapsed Breeder Prefixes, and the Pet Exchange Register undertake regular audits of Source Numbers granted to Recreational Breeders.

The registration process takes about 15 to 20 minutes (depending on how many animals you have) and, if completed online, the Source Number is generated immediately.

The first questions determine the breeder category that you fall into:

- » **Do you breed dogs and/or cats in Victoria?**
- » **Are you a breeding member of an Applicable Organisation?**
You should only answer 'YES' to this if your membership is current AND you hold a Dogs Victoria Breeder's Prefix
- » **Do you have more than ten fertile females?**

You are then asked to enter your email address, and a confirmation email is automatically generated containing a link that allows you to progress to the next stage of registration.

The next step is to set a password, which you will use to log in and access your account in future. This allows you to renew your Source Number, add or remove dogs, update your contact information, and change your account preferences at any time.

You will then be prompted to provide your details and the address at which any breeding will take place.

To ensure that applicants are genuine, you will need to enter details from a valid form of identification such as a Driver's License or Passport (or similar), so make sure you have that handy.

Finally, you are asked to enter the details of the animals that you currently house at your address (whether they are used for breeding or not) – so you will need details such as microchip numbers, dates of birth, and any whelping dates (if applicable) for each of your dogs.

You will also have to provide your Dogs Victoria membership number.

Once you have completed this, you will be immediately assigned a source number, and a confirmation email with the source number will be sent to your email address.

Important!

You can only use this Source Number for litters registered under your Dogs Victoria Breeder Prefix.

It can not be used for any other breeding activities (such as if you breed cats or someone else at your property breeds dogs outside of the Dogs Victoria rules and regulations).

Because the Source Number is only valid for a year, you are expected to Log In to your account and update your details each year, along with paying a renewal fee.

If you don't plan to have another litter for some time, you can let your Source Number lapse, and then Log In and renew it when you have your next litter.

Important!

Make sure that you keep a record of your Source Number and your Log In details for future use.



DV Breeder Series

Codes of Practice overview for breeders

What is a Code of Practice?

The Collins Dictionary defines a Code of Practice as ‘a written set of rules that outline how people working in a particular profession should behave’. Most commonly, Codes of Practice are government documents that are linked to a piece of legislation (law) and apply across the entire country or state.

These Codes of Practice are intended to help the general public understand the minimum standards that are expected in relation to a specific activity – for example, workplace health and safety requirements, or the proper handling of hazardous waste.

There are also Codes of Practice that may be developed and put in place by individual businesses or organisations.

Agreeing to follow or abide by these may be a condition of employment or membership. These are called ‘voluntary’ Codes of Practice because they are not part of government legislation. However, they usually ask for higher standards of behaviour than the Government minimums and set that organisation apart.

Who writes a Code of Practice?

In Victoria, Codes of Practice are developed by the Government Department responsible for the piece of legislation the Code relates to.

An advisory committee joins the Department staff and, with the input of a wide variety of stakeholders, a draft Code is written. The draft Code is then put out for community consultation and comment before the final document is sent to the relevant Minister to present to the Victorian Government for endorsement and release.

All Victorian Government Codes of Practice are reviewed at intervals to ensure that they reflect current knowledge and opinion, and incorporate any changes that have been made to the legislation over time.

Although they are often quite complex documents, they are far easier to understand and interpret than reading legislation and regulations, and often provide guidance on topics that are not specifically addressed by the wording of the laws.

Codes of Practice can be ‘mandatory’, meaning that they are fully enforceable – so you ‘must’ or ‘must not’ do certain things. Codes that are not mandatory, called ‘Advisory Codes’ act as guidelines of expected behaviour and provide an outline of a minimum standard that ‘should’ be achieved. Either way, these standards can be used in a Court of Law as the accepted minimum standard of behaviour.

What Codes of Practice apply to me as a Victorian dog owner?

There are Codes of Practice that have been developed under both the **Domestic Animals Act 1994** and the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986** that may apply to you as a dog owner or breeder – some are mandatory codes, others are advisory. Some apply to all dog owners; others apply only to those who undertake certain activities or meet specific criteria.

Below is a list of the Codes of Practice that may apply to you, and the government description of what the Code relates to. You can access the most up to date copy of each of the Codes of Practice from the [Animal Welfare Victoria](#) website

These Codes apply to ALL Dog Owners:

» [Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs](#)

‘This Code of Practice is intended to provide the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care appropriate to the physical and behavioural requirements of dogs.’

» [Code of Practice for the Debarking of Dogs](#)

‘This Code aims to protect the welfare of dogs from indiscriminate debarking and to encourage considerate management of debarked dogs.’

» [Code of Practice for the Tethering of Animals](#)

‘This Code has been developed to assist people to tether animals correctly when circumstances make it a necessary method of confining and protecting animals. The Code specifies the requirements for tethering dogs, sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys and horses.’

» [Code of Practice for the Training of Dogs and Cats to Wear Electronic Collars](#)

‘The **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019** sets out the legal requirements for the use of electronic collars on animals. This Code specifies the minimum standards required when training a dog or cat to the use of an electronic collar.’

When you decide that you want to become a dog **BREEDER**, there are additional Codes of Practice that will apply to your breeding activities. Breeders will need to be familiar with:

» [Code of Practice for the Responsible Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease](#)

‘This Code aims to educate animal breeders how to best minimise or avoid the development of heritable disease in progeny caused by inappropriate selection and mating of animals with heritable (genetic) defects. It also outlines breeding practices that will assist the reduction of the prevalence of the heritable defect in the animal population.’

This Code of Practice gives advice to ALL breeders on preventing heritable defects, but is considered **MANDATORY** for those breeders who have breeds affected by the following diseases:

- Von Willebrand’s Disease (VWD)
- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (NCL)
- Collie Eye Anomaly (CEA/CH)
- Hereditary Cataract (HC)

» [Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses](#)

‘This Code outlines minimum welfare standards for the housing and management of dogs and cats in breeding and rearing businesses.’

This Code separates breeders into four categories –

- **Micro-breeders** - breeders with 1 or 2 fertile females
- **Recreational Breeders** - Members of an Applicable Organisation (such as Dogs Victoria) with no more than 10 fertile breeding females
- **Domestic Animal Breeding Businesses** breeders with 3 to 10 fertile breeding females but who are not a member of an Applicable Organisation
- **Commercial Breeders** - any breeder with more than ten fertile breeding females

Important!

‘Micro-breeders’ and ‘Recreational Breeders’ are **EXEMPT** from registering with their local council as a Domestic Animal Business (Breeding) and **ARE NOT** required to comply with this mandatory Code.

HOWEVER, Recreational Breeders who have this exemption due to their membership of an Applicable Organisation ARE required to comply with their organisation’s Code of Ethics and rules. It is expected that the standards that the organisation set will be equal to or higher than those outlined in the Code – so the Code is still very relevant and breeders should be familiar with its contents.

How do I know which ‘minimum standard’ applies in my case?

As you can see, there are a LOT of different Codes of Practice, and it can be a bit confusing as to which ones are relevant, and which ones apply in your own individual case.

As each Code is revised and updated, there is a concerted effort to ensure none of them has conflicting information, but there have been cases where requirements have changed, and older Codes of Practice do not necessarily align with the new ones.

Being a member of an Applicable Organisation such as Dogs Victoria gives members significant exemptions and makes the situation even a little more confusing.

Dogs Victoria has its own [Code of Ethics, Rules and Regulations](#) that apply to all members and their dogs.

The government expects that the Dogs Victoria standards will be the same as the relevant Code or may require members to uphold a higher standard. They also expect that Dogs Victoria will address the issue through their compliance and disciplinary process when those standards are not met.

As a rough guide:

*The **Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs** is the absolute minimum standard that applies to all dog owners, carers and custodians across the state of Victoria.*

*If you are a **Dogs Victoria Member**, you must also abide by the **Dogs Victoria Constitution, Rules, Regulations and Code of Ethics Requirements**, regardless of whether you are a breeder or not.*

*If you are a **Dogs Victoria member who BREEDS their dogs** (has a Breeder’s Prefix), you should also be familiar with the **Code of Practice for the Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease** and have at least read the **Code of Practice for Breeding and Rearing Businesses**.*

Although you will be exempt from the Breeding and Rearing Code as a Recreational Breeder, there is an expectation by the government that your breeding practices will be in line with or exceed the minimum standards outlined.

*You will also need to be familiar with the **Dogs Victoria Codes of Practice, Rules and Regulations that apply specifically to breeding**.*

Where the Dogs Victoria standard and the standard outlined in the government Code of Practice differ, you should work to the higher of the two.

If there is no Dogs Victoria standard/rule in place, then the government Code of Practice standard is the default.

Breeders who hold a current Dogs Victoria 'Breeder's Prefix' are granted some very special exemptions by the Victorian Government, so it is important that you are committed to meeting or exceeding all of the requirements expected of a prefix holder. This includes adhering to all of the Dogs Victoria Rules, Regulations, and Codes of Practice/Conduct.

Important!

*These Dogs Victoria requirements for breeder members are **in addition** to the Local Council and State Government requirements that apply to all breeders in Victoria.*

Dogs Victoria is an 'Applicable Organisation'

Dogs Victoria is one of only a few canine bodies in Victoria approved under provisions in the **Domestic Animals Act 1994** as an 'Applicable Organisation'.

Applicable Organisation status acknowledges Dogs Victoria has Rules, Regulations and Codes of Ethics that meet or exceed the standards outlined under legislation, and that Dogs Victoria regulates its own members.

Approval as an Applicable Organisation places our breeder members in the 'Recreational Breeder' category and provides them with some important exemptions from the requirements of the **Act**.

Benefits of Applicable Organisation status include:

- » Members are exempt from mandatory council desexing orders;
- » Members are entitled to discounted council registration fees;
- » Breeder members (those with a breeder prefix) with up to 10 fertile bitches are exempt from registering with their local council as a Domestic Animal Business; and
- » Breeder members with up to 10 fertile bitches are also exempt from the **Code of Practice of Breeding and Rearing Businesses 2014** and instead are governed by the Dogs Victoria Constitution, Rules and Regulations.

To qualify for these exemptions:

- » The person must be a FULL financial member of Dogs Victoria (Companion Members do not qualify)
- » The dog (or dogs) must be registered with Dogs Victoria and in the ownership of the member (either outright or in syndication/co-ownership)
- » To qualify as a Recreational Breeder, the member must hold a Dogs Victoria 'Breeder Prefix' (breeder member) and all of their breeding animals must be listed on the MAIN register (Blue Pedigree Papers). All of their litters must also be registered with Dogs Victoria.

Qualifying for, and maintaining Applicable Organisation status involves assuring the Victorian Government that our members are complying with our Constitution, Rules and Regulations through several measures including regular communication, education, and field inspections.

Dogs Victoria field officer visits

As part of the self regulation expected by the Victorian Government, Dogs Victoria is required to conduct field visits. In fact, the number and type of field visits, and the total number of complaints handled by Dogs Victoria and their outcomes form two very important reporting requirements under the **Domestic Animals Act 1994** in order to maintain Applicable Organisation status.

All Dogs Victoria Breeder's Prefix holders are subject to Field Officer visits, where the emphasis is on making sure that the requirements set out in these breeder-specific sections of the regulations are being met. Although ALL members are subject to field visits, those members holding a breeder prefix and actively breeding are the primary focus for visits.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 3.7.7

It shall be a condition of membership that a person, or persons, so authorised by Management Committee may inspect the premises of any member and examine the dogs on the premises at that time.

Failure by a member to facilitate an inspection, on the second occasion, by the Field Officer of the member's premises and to examine the dogs without reasonable cause will result in immediate suspension of the member's privileges until a satisfactory inspection has taken place.

It is important to note that Dogs Victoria Field Officers are not 'Authorised Officers' under legislation and cannot conduct a field visit to members without prior notification. However, they can attend a member's premises at any time if requested to accompany a local government, or other relevant authority Authorised Officer.

Dogs Victoria Field Officers also provide a Council Liaison service, acting as intermediaries between Dogs Victoria and local government/authorised officers should the need arise. The Field Officer role is directed and overseen by the Dogs Victoria Breeders Education and Health Committee.

Rules and regulations

National rules

The breeding of purebred, pedigree dogs occurs in nearly every country around the world. Each country has a recognised pedigree register responsible for overseeing the registration of litters and the issuing of pedigree papers. In Australia, the national body is Dogs Australia (Australian National Kennel Council Ltd.).

Dogs Australia's mission statement:

To promote excellence in breeding, showing, trialling, obedience and other canine related activities and the ownership of temperamentally and physically sound purebred dogs by responsible individuals across Australia.

To promote responsible dog ownership and encourage State Member Bodies to put in place programs to that effect.

To act as spokesperson on all canine related activities on a National basis on behalf of State Member Bodies and to pledge assistance and support to the respective State Member Bodies.

Dogs Australia has [rules and regulations](#), along with codes of practice that ensure that there is consistency across the states.

These rules provide the basis for canine competition across a wide variety of disciplines, stipulate the requirements for the training of judges, and set the rules for the registration of both purebred dogs born in Australia, and those imported from overseas.

Dogs Australia is also responsible for the overseeing and publishing of all Breed Standards and Breed Standard Extensions and the maintenance of the National 'Prefix' Register.

Although some of the State Member Body Rules and Regulations may take precedence over the Dogs Australia Rules and Regulations, you need to be familiar with the Dogs Australia rules that relate to breeding. These are mostly contained in 'Part 6 – The Register and Registration', and 'Part 10 – National Prefix Register' of the Dogs Australia Regulations.

Dogs Victoria rules and regulations

Dogs Victoria is the Dogs Australia state member body in Victoria.

As a member of Dogs Victoria, you **'agree to be bound by the full Constitution, Rules and Regulations, Code of Practice, policies and procedures of Dogs Victoria'** as part of your membership application.

Although it may seem quite daunting, you should take time to familiarise yourself with these documents and the sections that specifically relate to you. Always make sure that you are referring to the correct version of these, as updates are made a number of times each year.

Important!

You can access the most up to date versions of the Rules, Regulations and Constitution from the Dogs Victoria website at any time. Visit dogsvictoria.org.au.

Although the Dogs Victoria rules and regulations apply to all members, there are sections that relate to breeders and breeding specifically. If you plan to become a breeder with Dogs Victoria, you will need to understand the requirements under these sections so that your breeding activities are fully compliant and you meet the standards expected.

When you are subject to a Dogs Victoria field visit, the Field Officer will be particularly interested in making sure you are adhering to the criteria stipulated in Dogs Victoria Regulations '20.1 – Code of Practice', and '20.8 – Code of Practice For Breeding Animal Health Management'.

As mentioned earlier, the State Government provides Dogs Victoria breeder members with significant exemptions – including exemption from the mandatory *Code of Practice of Breeding and Rearing Businesses 2014*, which applies to all other dog breeders in the state that have more than two relevant fertile females.

You will see that many of the requirements for breeders under the Dogs Victoria Rules, Regulations and Code of Ethics are almost identical to those in the Government Code of Practice. This is because the Dogs Victoria standards are expected to **meet or exceed** the standards outlined under legislation.

Key requirements for Dogs Victoria breeders

Core principles

There are a number of core principles that set Dogs Victoria breeders apart from other breeders.

There is a commitment to continually improving your knowledge and striving always to produce happy, healthy puppies that are true to their breed standard.

There is also a commitment to take your part in preserving your chosen breed as it has been developed, reducing the incidence of hereditary diseases, and to breed for the improvement of the breed, rather than for financial gain.

Regulation 20.1.4

Members shall constantly strive to improve their knowledge of their chosen breed or breeds, and their knowledge of the requirements for the care, welfare and betterment of dogs.

Regulation 20.1.11

A member shall breed primarily for the purpose of improving the quality and/or working ability of the breed in accordance with the breed standard, and not specifically or predominantly for the pet or commercial market.

Regulation 20.1.15

No breeding shall take place unless both the dog and bitch are on the Main Register. Dogs and bitches are not permitted to be mated to a dog or bitch of a different breed, to a cross bred dog or bitch, or to an unregistered dog or bitch of the same breed.

Regulation 20.1.16

*A member shall take responsible action to reduce the incidence of hereditary diseases in accordance with the Dogs Australia Code of Practice for Hereditary Diseases and shall comply with Dogs Victoria's Code of Practice for Hereditary Diseases (Code 20.3), and the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986**, particularly with respect to the Code of Practice for the Responsible Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease.*

A written veterinary agreement shows that a bona fide relationship exists between the breeder and the veterinarian and that the breeder is aware of which services the veterinarian can and cannot provide.

It also prompts a discussion with your veterinarian in regards to your planned breeding activities, your facilities, and the health of any potential breeding stock.

Regulation 20.8.4

A breeder shall have a written agreement with one or more veterinary practitioners that describes arrangements for:

- » *the use of the veterinary practitioner's facilities for the treatment of animals;*
- » *the provision of isolation housing if the breeder does not have a separate isolation housing; and the supervision of animals in isolation who remain in the care of the breeder;*
- » *advice relating to the health management plan for the breeder if Dogs Victoria's Model Health Management Plan for Breeders is not used;*
- » *providing vaccination certificates for puppies being sold from the breeder;*
- » *providing veterinary assistance for the breeder and able to provide treatment and/or services to the breeder within 6 hours of notification that veterinary attention is required; and*
- » *24 hour contact or treatment or provision of services through an alternative 24 hour or emergency practice*

You will need a formal 'Veterinary Agreement'

All dog owners will at some stage in their pet's life, utilise the services of a veterinarian. This may be for routine or preventative health care, illness or injury. The majority of pet owners develop a casual relationship with a local veterinarian or veterinary practice that provides these services for their pet if and when they are required.

If you plan on breeding dogs, the need for veterinary care increases – there will be health testing of breeding stock, reproductive advice and assistance, whelping assistance, post whelping care of the bitch and pups, vaccination and microchipping prior to the sale of puppies and regular health checks.

For this reason, there is a requirement that all Dogs Victoria breeders have a 'written agreement' with one or more veterinary practitioners so that this relationship is formalised.

Many Veterinarians and Veterinary Practices have their own agreements that they prefer to use for this purpose, but if not, Dogs Victoria has a ['model' Veterinary Agreement](#) template that you can use to meet this requirement.

You will need a written 'Health Management Plan'

There is also the requirement to formalise your protocols for managing the health and wellbeing of your dogs.

For regular pet owners, most of the requirements for managing individual dogs' health and wellbeing are driven and prompted by their veterinarian. The owners take their new pup for its puppy vaccination appointment and are given advice about appropriate feeding, parasite control, vaccination schedules, and preventative health care for that breed and age group.

Yearly health checks are scheduled by the clinic, and reminders sent to the owner for essential health care events. As the pet gets older, the advice changes based on the animal's age and any health issues, injuries or illnesses that may have developed over time. The pet owner's relationship with their dog will be a one on one type relationship, with the dog often included in family activities and a part of daily household events.

As you progress to being a breeder, often the dynamic with your pets will change. You are more likely to have a multi pet household, with animals of different age groups and needs. You will be undertaking activities that regular pet owners do not do – such as rearing puppies, managing sexually active dogs and bitches, and selecting breeding stock. Your time will be spread across a number of animals, and it is important that every animal on your premises receives everything they need for both their physical and mental wellbeing.

Having a documented 'Health Management Plan' also ensures that all of the people involved in the care of your animals are aware of what is required and when. Most Dogs Victoria breeders have the entire family involved in the care of their dogs, so it is an excellent way to make sure that everyone has a documented description of the tasks that need to be done daily, weekly or at set times, and what the plan is should things go wrong.

The requirement to document a Health Management Plan, review it each year, and discuss it with your veterinarian, can also prompt healthy discussions about current thinking in regards to the care of dogs and help you keep up to date.

Regulation 20.8.5

A breeder shall either:

- » *Adopt Dogs Victoria's Model Health Management Plan for Breeders, or*
- » *Alternatively develop their own written health management plan that has been formulated and is reviewed annually in consultation with a veterinary practitioner, and meets the requirements for Health Management Plans which are contained within Section 3(5) of the Victorian Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses (2014)*

Your Health Management Plan needs to include protocols for:

- » *Grooming requirements*
- » *Exercise, environmental enrichment and socialisation programs*
- » *Behavioural and welfare assessment of dogs*
- » *Assessment programs for the health and welfare of dogs being reared for sale or as breeding dogs*
- » *Assessment for admission of new breeding dogs*
- » *Processes for determining the suitability of breeding dogs to continue breeding*
- » *Processes for long term management, desexing and/or assessing suitability for rehoming of retired breeding dogs*
- » *Whelping protocols*
- » *Health assessment for puppies*
- » *Vaccination and/or titre testing protocols, internal and external parasite prevention programs consistent with Dogs Victoria's position on these*
- » *Response to a general outbreak of disease*
- » *Protocols for quarantine and movement of dogs, including new animals introduced*
- » *Management of isolation facilities (where isolation facilities are constructed at the breeder's premises)*
- » *Consideration of an appropriate response to foreseeable emergencies for both humans and dogs, including evacuation procedures*
- » *Approved methods of euthanasia for emergency situations consistent with Dogs Victoria's position on euthanasia*

Dogs Victoria has produced a '[model' Health Management Plan](#) document that covers all of the expected content of a Health Management Plan. A printer 'friendly' version is also available - both can be found in the Breeder Resources section of the 'Breeders' tab

It can be modified to suit your individual requirements. There is space for you to outline specific procedures, or variations to protocols if you choose. Because it has been developed and endorsed by veterinarians, if you choose to use it and only delete sections that are not relevant to your breeding operations, you do not require any further endorsement of the document by your own veterinarian.

If, on the other hand, you would like to develop your own plan, or make changes or variations to the Dogs Victoria model document, you will need to discuss these with your veterinarian and have them sign off on the changes.

You will need to keep comprehensive records

As a Dogs Victoria Breeder, you will be required to keep records for all of your breeding activities, and for each of your individual animals. These records are subject to inspection at any time, so they need to be kept up to date.

Regulation 4.3.1

A member shall keep proper records of their breeding activities and all such records so kept shall be open for inspection by any person authorised by Management Committee. Any such person shall be at liberty to take extracts there from.

Regulation 20.1.22 - Record Keeping Requirements

A breeder shall create a record file for each individual puppy born, and maintain until ownership changes or the animal is deceased. A breeder shall make available all records for inspection by an authorised officer or as directed by an officer of Dogs Victoria. Copies of these records must be retained by the breeder for a minimum of 3 years from date of last entry.

1.1 Records to be kept for puppies **UNDER 12 weeks** of age shall include the following (copies of original documents are acceptable where originals accompany the puppy to its new owner):

- » A copy of the litter registration form, or alternatively:
 - name,
 - microchip number (when implanted);
 - sex;
 - breed;
 - date of birth;
 - colour and markings (if applicable); and
 - dam and sire registered names and numbers
- » Health care history including vaccination records, internal and external parasite control,
- » Purchase/disposal record including name and address of new owner (where applicable),
- » Copy of breeder health declaration, and
- » Record of return (if applicable) with supporting documentation.

1.2 Records to be kept for dogs **OVER the age of 12 weeks** acquired or retained by breeders for the purpose of breeding shall include:

- » Either Dogs Australia pedigree registration certificate, or alternatively:
 - registered name and number (when registration details become available);
 - microchip number;
 - sex;
 - breed;
 - date of birth;
 - colour and marking (if applicable); and
 - dam and sire registered name and numbers
- » Council registration certificate;
- » Health care history including vaccination records or titre tests, internal and external parasite control,
- » Breeding status and breeding history,
- » Purchase/disposal records including name and address of new owner (where applicable), and
- » Record of return (if applicable) with supporting documentation.

2. Records of breeding history for dams must include dates of mating or artificial insemination, dates of whelping, number of puppies born alive, number of puppies stillborn, record of any whelping complications and resultant treatment, microchip numbers for live pups at 8 weeks, and post-partum veterinary treatment.

Dogs Victoria has developed a number of helpful template documents to assist breeders and members in meeting their record keeping requirements.

These template documents include model veterinary certificates for puppies and adults, pre breeding and post whelping veterinary checks, litter records and individual animal record forms. You can download the most up to date template documents from the Breeder Resources page of the [Dogs Victoria website](#).

For puppies under 12 weeks of age, most of the required information can be collectively held in a 'Litter Record' where records for the entire litter are held together in one place. Dogs Victoria has a template litter record document that you can use or you can design your own to suit your needs. The litter record can include other information such as birth weights and times, daily weight records, dates of worming or other treatments etc.

Although it may seem daunting, once you have set up your record keeping system, it will only need updating when events such as veterinary health checks occur, results of tests are received, or when preventative treatments are given.

Although some hard copy documents need to be kept, many breeders are now choosing to use electronic record keeping where possible. You can save electronic copies of certificates or health testing results, and use spreadsheets for the day to day and breeding records of each animal.

Regardless of what you choose to use, you will need to keep your files up to date and be able to present them for inspection if required.

Important!

If you sell (or give away) a dog - whether it is a puppy or an adult - you are still required to keep copies of all of the animal's documentation.

Other Dogs Victoria regulations relating to breeding

Although the key requirements have been highlighted here, there are numerous other Dogs Victoria regulations that relate to breeding and breeders.

You should have read and understood the contents of Regulations 20.1 – Code of Practice, 20.3 – Code of Practice for Hereditary Disease, and 20.8 – Code of Practice for Breeding Animal Health Management as well as Regulations 3.7.7 and 4.3

To assist with this, Dogs Victoria has prepared an 'extract of regulations' relating specifically to breeders and breeding. This extract is included as an appendix of this booklet, however you need to remember that regulations can change over time.

You can always access an up to date version of the regulations by visiting the Dogs Victoria website.

DV Breeder Series

Setting yourself up for success

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.

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.

DV Breeder Series

Setting yourself up for success

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!

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 veterinarian

Developing a good relationship with your veterinarian 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 veterinarian 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 veterinarians 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 veterinarians 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.



As a breeder, you want to be doing the right thing, but there are so many things you need to do to meet all of the requirements of both Dogs Victoria and the Victorian State Government.

To help our breeders, Dogs Victoria has prepared a checklist for each step of the breeding process - from becoming a breeder with Dogs Victoria through to selling your puppies.

To help even more, Dogs Victoria has prepared template documents to make it easier for you to meet many of the requirements. The most up to date versions of the templates are always available on the [Breeder Resources](#) page of the Dogs Victoria website.

1. Local Council Requirements

- All of your animals are registered with your Local Council
- You have an Excess Animal Permit (if required)
- Dog breeding activities are permitted under your property's zoning rules
- You have a Planning Permit (if required)

2. Dogs Victoria Breeder Requirements

- You have been a member for at least 12 months
- You have passed the Dogs Victoria Breeder Education Package Assessment
- You have applied for your Breeder Prefix and have received **written confirmation that your Prefix has been granted**
- If your Prefix was granted more than 12 months ago, you have paid your prefix and membership renewal fees

3. Before you breed your litter

- You have applied for a **source number** with the [Pet Exchange Register](#) (and have made sure to renew it to ensure it is current at the time of your planned litter)
- You have a [Veterinary Services Agreement](#) with one or more veterinarians
- You have a written [Breeder Health Management Plan](#)
- You have defined some breeding goals and developed a breeding plan
- You have set up your breeder record keeping system

4. Your Breeding Female

- Your breeding female is registered on the Dogs Australia **Main Register** (blue papers)
- She is registered in your name or you have a lease agreement in place (completed on the back of her papers)
- She has reached the **Minimum Breeding Age** for your breed (as defined in the [Dogs Victoria Regulations](#))
- All of her breed specific health testing has been completed and any health screening certificates are current
- She has a DNA Profile recorded
- If this is her **first litter**, she has a '[Clearance to Commence Breeding](#)' certificate
- She has had a [Veterinary Health Check](#) in the **last 12 months**
- If she will be 8 years or older at the time of breeding she has had a [Veterinary Breeding Clearance Certificate - 8 years and older](#) issued **within the last 3 months**



5. Stud Dog

- Your chosen stud dog is registered on the Dogs Australia **Main Register** (blue papers) and is the same breed/variety as your female
- All** of the Stud Dog's owners are **current financial members** of their state's controlling body
- Your chosen stud dog has undergone all of his **breed specific health testing** and any health screening certificates are current
- He has a DNA Profile recorded
- The owner(s) of your chosen stud dog have provided you with copies of his health clearance results clearly showing the dog's microchip number.
- You have a written **Stud Agreement** prior to mating
- He has had a [Veterinary Health Check](#) in the **last 12 months**
- He is not a first generation relation (i.e. father, brother, son) of your breeding female

6. When you have a Litter

- Your proposed breeding complies with any [Dogs Australia Litter Registration Limitations](#) or breed specific restrictions.
- Your proposed breeding complies with the Victorian State Government's [Code of Practice for the Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease](#)
- You make sure that you keep comprehensive Litter Records
- You ensure that the mother of the litter has a [Post Whelping Veterinary Health Check](#)
- Your litter is raised in line with the requirements outlined within the **Dogs Victoria Breeder Education Package**
- Every puppy undergoes a veterinary health check, is vaccinated and microchipped prior to sale.
- Your litter Registration paperwork is lodged with Dogs Victoria **within 3 months of whelping**, with all of the required documentation and signatures.
- Any advertising you do complies with [State Government](#) and [Dogs Victoria](#) requirements
- You provide a written [Breeder Health Declaration](#) for each puppy at time of sale
- All new owners are provided with the required information and documentation and you keep copies of all documentation for your records
- You adhere to all of the [Sale Guarantee](#) requirements
- You offer continued advice and reasonable assistance with puppy purchasers



DOGS
VICTORIA
YOUR CANINE COMMUNITY

Section 2

Breeding Basics

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Locked Bag K9, Cranbourne Vic 3977

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First steps in developing a breeding program

Everyone has a different reason for deciding they might like to become a breeder. It may simply be that your bitch has given you so much happiness and joy that you would like to breed yourself another just like her. Perhaps her breeder introduced you to conformation showing, dog sports or other breed activities where she has performed well and is now encouraging you to breed her, or maybe you have friends or family who have expressed interest in having a pet like yours.

Regardless of the reasons, you will have already realised that breeding dogs comes with quite a bit of responsibility, and plenty of hard work. Even if your initial ideas were to breed a litter and give them away to family and friends as pets, you now realise that it might not be as simple as that – there are government requirements, local council requirements, and legal obligations extending well beyond the time the pups head off to their new homes.

You are going to be responsible for the puppies you produce, and you want to do it well – both to maximise your chances of breeding a successful litter and to minimise the risks of producing puppies with heart breaking health or temperament issues. Although at this stage, you may only be interested in breeding one litter to see if breeding dogs is for you, it is a good idea to have a bigger picture plan and to do your homework thoroughly before that first mating occurs.

What are you trying to achieve?

When starting out breeding, your goals may be relatively simple – you want to breed the bitch that you have, and you want to produce puppies who are healthy and happy for yourself and others to enjoy as companions and pets. These are all excellent goals.

As you learn more about breeding and your breed, your goals may become a little more specific. Your understanding of what makes an excellent example of your breed, and what your bitch is likely to produce may make you a little more discerning. You will begin to understand your role as a ‘guardian’ of your breed and how choices you make may actually impact your breed, both now and into the future.

Your goal should always be to strive for improvement – each generation healthier and more sound than the one before – regardless of whether it is your first litter or your fortieth.

To do this, you will need to learn everything about your breed that you can and develop a critical eye so you can identify areas where individual dogs excel and where they could improve. All of this knowledge will form the basis of your breeding program.

Developing a breeding program - where to start

A good idea is to start by documenting the things you would like to achieve within the breed. Are you looking at producing dogs with an excellent working ability or an aptitude for a specific task? Are you looking to produce a top winning show dog? Or are you looking to breed dogs with temperaments that make them ideal as family companions? Maybe all of the above?

It is unlikely that all of these goals will be achieved in a single generation. Rather, they may take several generations to reach. Even if you did happen to achieve your initial goals in a single generation, the challenge is then to continue to produce dogs of a similar standard and make improvements on each subsequent generation – remember no dog is perfect, there is always something you could improve!

Next, you need to critically look at your bitch and be honest about how close she is to your ideal, and consider what you would need to improve on her to achieve your goals.

This can be the hardest step – you may not have the knowledge just yet to be able to do this well, and because your bitch is a member of your family, your friend and companion, it may be hard to be critical.

This is where surrounding yourself with good mentors can make all the difference. You need knowledgeable and honest mentors who can help you identify your bitch’s virtues and areas that she may need to improve to achieve your breeding goals.

When evaluating potential breeding stock, one strategy is to create a spreadsheet or chart that breaks down all of the physical, health and behavioural attributes as individual items. You can then list what your breed standard requires, and what your ideal would be. Working with your mentor, you can then work through each attribute one at a time, looking at the animal in front of you.

Although your immediate plans probably involve breeding the bitch that you have, if she has a lot of areas or attributes that could do with improvement, you may find yourself spending many generations trying to get to the point that you could have started at had you have waited until you had a bitch of better quality.

Hard as it may be, you may be better off waiting until you have a bitch that is closer to your ideal to start your breeding program.

Setting long term and short term goals

Your goals will direct your breeding program. You need to be clear about what you want to achieve or what you are aspiring to produce.

Your short term breeding goals should be the things you are trying to achieve in your next litter.

'I would like to breed "xxx" with the plan to enhance/improve the following physical, health, and behavioural characteristics....'

Your long term breeding goals should address the things that you hope to achieve over a number of litters or generations.

'I would like to take steps to produce a line of 'insert your breed here' that excels in that is free from.....'

Once you have written down your goals, you will need to spend time studying your breed both here and worldwide. You will be looking for individual animals that have the attributes you are aiming to produce. Or those that appear to reliably produce them in their progeny.

You will want to become familiar with kennels and breeders who have similar goals to you, who are relentless in the pursuit of healthy and sound examples of the breed and look at the breeding choices they make and the progeny they are producing.

By learning as much as you can, you will be able to make better choices in trying to attain your goals.

Your breeding decisions should be well considered

Now that you have documented your breeding goals, it is time to start plotting out your breeding program. Your breeding program will include your plans for your first litter, the one after that and into the future.

Most good breeders are always planning a few litters into the future, or even a generation ahead. There should never be a time where breeding decisions are made on the spur of the moment because your bitch has come into season a little early.

You will want to find the male that best compliments your bitch – the one that excels in the areas she needs improvement in, that has all of his health clearances, and who has the required temperament.

You will need to have approached the stud dog's owner and come to an agreement regarding any potential mating. You will also need time to complete all of your bitch's health clearances and veterinary checks.

Be prepared to change your plans

No doubt as you progress, your breeding goals may change – sometimes quite significantly.

In terms of your breeding program, you may find that new opportunities arise that you had not considered, or your plans may be dashed when unexpected events occur. Breeding is certainly challenging.

After every litter, you need to reassess your breeding goals and critically evaluate the success of your litter:

- » Did you achieve what you were hoping to?
- » Did you encounter any unexpected outcomes?
- » Would you breed your girl again, and if you did, would you change your plans now that you have seen what she produces?
- » Have your long or short term goals been met?
- » Do you need to change your priorities and selection criteria?

Breeding Programs need to be fluid and adaptable. Along the way, there might be health or behavioural issues that crop up that need to be addressed within your breed, or within your breeding animals, or you may find that you have to take a step sideways to move forward.

Don't be fooled that breeding to a goal is easy.



DV Breeder Series

Breeding Basics – Genetics

As a breeder you will be responsible for selecting animals for breeding based on a whole host of traits and aptitudes that you value and wish to pass on to the next generation. You also want to minimise disease and undesirable traits in the litters you produce.

Your goal will always be to breed for improvement – each litter or generation healthier than the last, each litter moving closer to the breed standard ideal.

To do this well, you need to have a basic understanding of genetics and inheritance. In fact, the better you understand how traits are passed from generation to generation, the easier it will be to make informed breeding choices. Having a good understanding of inheritance can also help when unexpected problems crop up and you need to develop a hypothesis of how they may have been transmitted through the gene pool.

Many breeders find the science of genetics very complicated and quite daunting to learn, but without it, you are unlikely to be able to move ahead in your breeding program. There are a lot of good references for breeders – some more technical than others – that can help you understand how traits are passed from generation to generation and how the study of genetics can be used to help your breeding program.

This overview aims to give you a basic understanding of the important concepts, but as a breeder, you should always be looking to expand your knowledge further. You are taking a role as the guardian of your breed, so you want to make sure you never stop learning, questioning and striving for improvement.

First Principles

Genetics is the study of how traits are passed on from one generation to the next.

The individual units of inheritance are called 'genes' with each gene specifically relating to a single trait or function. Our genes determine everything from what colour hair and eyes we have, to how tall we are and how our body functions and behaves.

At the heart of the science of genetics is a special substance called DNA – Deoxyribonucleic Acid. The DNA exists inside each cell as long strands of 'genetic code' – like a recipe book for growing and maintaining a working body. A single strand of DNA can contain thousands of individual genes all coding for different things.

Because the strands of DNA can be very, very long, they are coiled up tightly to save space. These coiled up strands are called 'chromosomes'.

Chromosomes come in pairs, meaning that there are two copies of every gene. We inherit one copy from our father, and one copy from our mother.

Every animal has a set number of chromosomes. Cats have 19 chromosome pairs and humans have 23 pairs. Dogs have 39 pairs. Of this 39 pairs, 38 of them are perfectly matched pairs called 'autosomal pairs' and the remaining pair may be unmatched and are called the 'sex chromosomes'.

Sex chromosomes are labelled 'X' and 'Y'. If an animal has two 'X' chromosomes (XX), they develop into a female, and if they have an 'X' and a 'Y' (XY), they develop into a male animal.

During the production of sperm cells and egg cells, a special process occurs that divides the chromosome pairs found in normal cells so that only one copy of each chromosome (and therefore only one copy of each gene) is carried by each sperm or egg.

During this division process, there is a somewhat random assortment of genes – no two eggs, and no two sperm are exactly the same because there are thousands of genes and therefore millions of possible combinations.

When fertilization occurs, these single chromosomes, carried by the sperm and the egg, join together to produce a single cell with a full set of paired chromosomes. From here, the cell will grow and divide, becoming a new animal.

You can see that even within a litter there will be quite a bit of genetic variation because of all of the possible egg-sperm combinations. This goes some of the way to explaining why no two puppies are identical, even if they are from the same litter.

Note:

Identical twins in dogs are extraordinarily rare. Identical twins occur when a single fertilised egg divides and becomes two embryos.

The genetic coding that each individual receives from their parents is called their 'genetic potential' – what we would see if nothing went wrong, and everything was perfect from the time of fertilisation until the animal died. However, in reality, there are a lot of external factors that can influence what actually happens during an animal's lifetime – factors such as diet, disease, injury and environment can all impact the eventual outcomes.

Scientists have now 'mapped' the entire dog genome – meaning they have identified the location of all of the genes on each of the chromosomes. This information is used when looking for markers for a disease, or developing DNA tests for a particular trait.

Important!

As a breeder, you need to remember that all animals carry both 'good' or 'healthy' genes and 'bad' or 'unhealthy' genes. Therefore, no matter how successful or amazing an animal is – they will still produce some offspring that are 'less good' and have more of the undesirable traits.

DV Breeder Series

Breeding Basics – Genetics

So how do genes work?

The body of every animal is made up of billions of individual cells. The cells vary in shape and size, and they do different 'jobs' within the body – some are skin cells, some are liver cells, some are responsible for fighting infection, others produce the enzymes needed to digest food.

The 'instructions' for growing all of these cells and maintaining a functioning body are coded for in the genes. Each gene can be 'read' and the instructions will lead to the production of a single protein. It is the protein that goes off into the cell or into the body to actually cause the 'effect'.

These proteins are involved in every imaginable cell, tissue and body function. From building bones and muscles, to replacing and repairing cells, to triggering the changes that make one cell grow into a nerve cell and another into a cell that secretes a specific hormone. It is truly amazing how it all works!

Some traits that we see are the result of a single gene and a single protein, whereas other traits are the result of a combination of many genes (and many proteins) acting together.

Some important terminology

Genetics has a language all of its own. Unfortunately as a breeder, you will need to learn at least some of this terminology if you want to understand some basic genetic concepts. So here are some of the most commonly used terms:

Genes – these are the 'units' of inheritance, a small section of DNA. Remember: every animal has two copies of every gene

Allele – alleles are the various different forms of a single gene. You could consider these the 'possible options' for that particular gene. For example, a gene that codes for coat type may have the possible options of 'wavy' or 'straight' – the 'wavy allele' and the 'straight allele'.

Homozygous – refers to an individual whose two copies of the gene are the same.

Heterozygous – refers to an individual whose two copies of the gene are different.



Genotype – refers to the actual genes the animal carries – the combination of alleles it has.

Phenotype – refers to what we can see – the expression of the genes. Because there are two copies of every gene, there is a variety of possible interactions and outcomes. Phenotype is the visible result of these interactions.

Heritability – A statistical representation of how much of a trait is likely to be due to genetics and how much is due to environment.

Traits with very high heritability have very little environmental influence, and are usually much easier to select for or against when choosing breeding animals. Traits with very low heritability are heavily impacted by environmental factors, and are therefore much harder to selectively breed for or against.

Modes of inheritance

There are many different modes of inheritance. This refers to the way the genes and the different alleles interact.

There are simple dominant-recessive interactions, sex-linked and polygenic modes of inheritance, and then there are variations of these such as incomplete dominance, incomplete penetrance, and the effects of epigenetics. Sound complicated? Well it is!

Simple dominant – recessive inheritance

As a breeder, probably the most important mode of inheritance that you need to understand is the simple dominant-recessive interaction that is seen when a single gene controls a single trait. This form of inheritance is important to understand because many serious diseases are inherited in this way.

Example:

We have identified a single gene that determines the colour of a particular breed's coat. In this breed, there are only two possible coat colours – black and cream (these are the two possible *alleles*).

We know that every individual has two copies of the coat colour gene, one from their mother and one from their father. So they can either have two copies of the gene for the same colour – black/black or cream/cream (*homozygous*) or they can have one copy of each - black/cream (*heterozygous*).

Because we can see the coat colour we have a visual display of how the genes interact (*phenotype*). If the animal only has the genes for the black coat colour – they will have a black coat, if they only have the genes for the cream coat colour, they will have a cream coat.

If they have one copy of each gene – the coat colour we see will tell us how the two genes interact. In this case, the coat is black, so the black coat gene is said to be 'dominant', and the cream coat gene is said to be 'recessive'.

DV Breeder Series

Breeding Basics – Genetics

When geneticists write this, they use the capital letter to indicate the dominant gene and the lower case of the same letter to indicate the recessive gene. So, in this case they may use 'B' for black and, 'b' for cream in genetics shorthand.

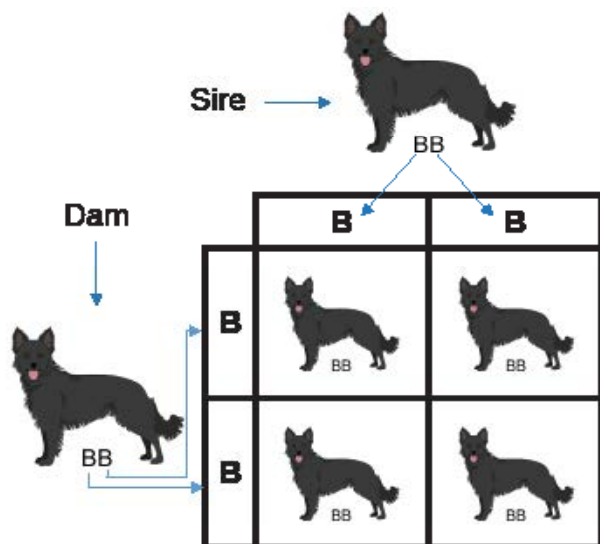
So the possible combinations would be written like this:

- » BB – Only carries black, also called *homozygous black*
- » bb – Only carries cream, also called *homozygous cream*
- » Bb – *heterozygous black*, but said to 'carry' the cream gene



Because we know that when a breeding occurs – the offspring receive one copy of the gene from each parent we can now predict what possible combinations, and hence coat colours, would result from any of the possible combinations.

Geneticists use a tool called a 'Punnet Square' to show the possible combinations. The genotype of the mother is put on one side of the square and the genotype of the father is put on the adjacent side, and the possible combinations are then plotted.

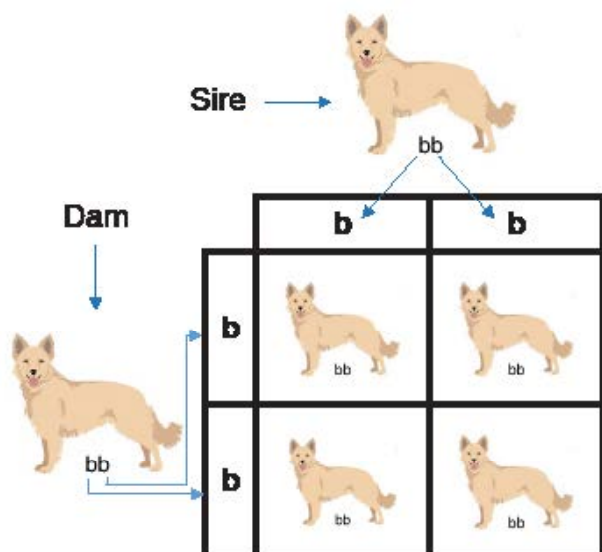


Combination 1

BB x BB (Black to Black)

Each Parent can only contribute the Black gene, as this is all that they have.

All offspring will be Black



Combination 2

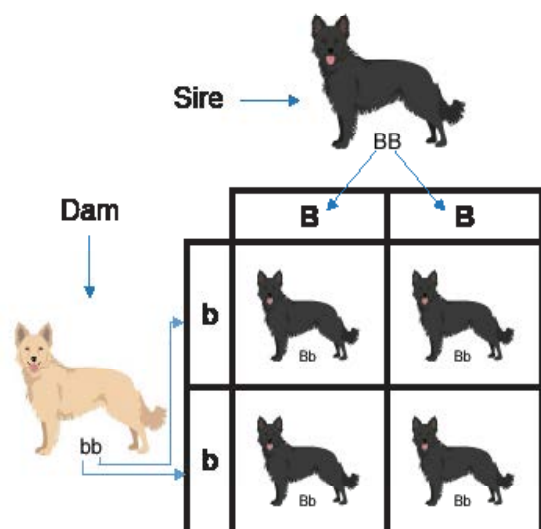
bb x bb (Cream to Cream)

Each Parent can only contribute the Cream gene, as this is all that they have

All offspring will be Cream

DV Breeder Series

Breeding Basics – Genetics

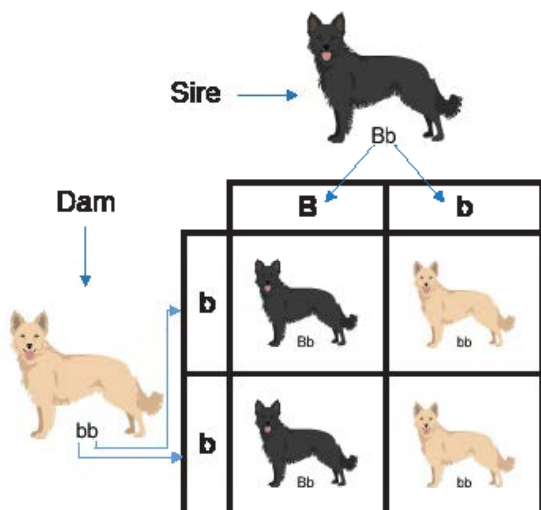


Combination 3

$BB \times bb$ (Homozygous Black to Cream)

In this case one parent will contribute the Black gene and the other will contribute the Cream gene

All offspring will be 'Bb' genetically and their coats will be BLACKbut they will ALL 'carry the cream gene'

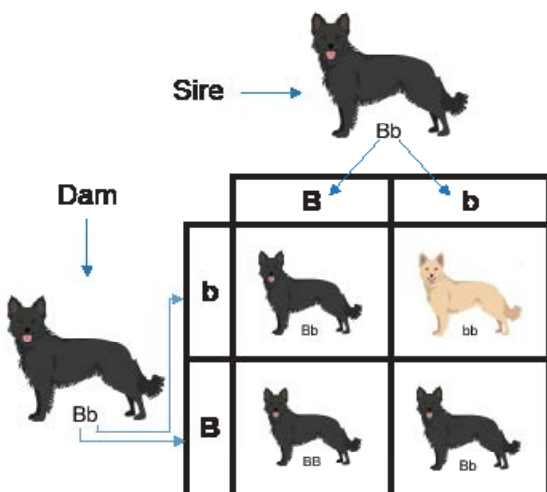


Combination 4

$Bb \times bb$ (Heterozygous Black to Cream)

In this case the cream parent can only contribute the cream gene, but the Black parent can either contribute the Black gene OR the Cream gene.

The result will be 50% Bb and 50% bb – half of the offspring will be Cream and the other half will be Black but all of the Black offspring will carry the cream gene.



Combination 5

$Bb \times Bb$ (Both parents heterozygous black)

In this case both parents may either contribute the Black or the Cream gene.

The result will be 25% BB, 25%Bb, 25% bB and 25% bb.

Bb and bB are the same – both will have black coats but carry for cream.

So on average one in four of the offspring will be cream, and of the Black coated offspring, 2 out of 3 will carry the cream gene.

Remember: For Combinations 4 and 5, the percentages listed are only **an average if there were an infinite number of matings**. The actual result in any single litter will vary and might not reflect the expected outcome at all. For example, with combination 4 it is possible that all of the puppies in the litter might be cream, regardless of the number of puppies in the litter.

How might this relate to health?

Imagine if the trait we were looking at caused something more serious – a disease or fault that was transmitted in the same way.

You can see if the fault or health defect was 'dominant' and if it caused the affected animals to die or not be able to reproduce, the disease would be quickly removed from the population.

Imagine if the black coat gene (*the dominant allele in the above example*) was paired with a heart defect that caused pups to die at quite a young age.

You can see that the black coated pups would not get to reproduce, and the black coated pups that carried the healthier cream genes would also not pass their genetics on – so it would not take long for the entire population to have cream coats and normal hearts.

Of course, every now and then a mutation can occur leading to a dominant trait emerging, but it soon gets 'bred out' of the population by natural selection.

Very few diseases are caused by dominant genetic traits for this reason. Instead, most of the problematic diseases and defects are the result of a recessive trait. Often the carriers are not obvious and cannot be tested for. The first time you know one of your animals is a carrier is when you accidentally mate it to another carrier – so an affected individual appears from a breeding of two apparently normal parents.

Although this sounds very bad, having carriers in the population is not a problem if there is a genetic test available that can identify them. If you are aware of an animal's genetic status as a carrier, you can then select a breeding partner who is clear of the problem, and prevent producing puppies that carry two copies of the problem gene, and who are affected by the disease.

Sex-linked traits

When animals get their genes from their parents, there is one special pair of chromosomes that are not like the others – the sex chromosomes.

As we discussed earlier, a female will result when two copies of the X chromosome are inherited, and males when there is an X and a Y chromosome.

Of course, the X- and Y-chromosomes also carry genes for other traits along their length, with the Y chromosome being much shorter and having fewer genes. Because there are quite a few genes on the X chromosome, and males can only have one copy, it means they are at a much higher risk of being affected by recessive traits or diseases coded for on the X chromosome.

Where can I learn more about genetics and inheritance?

Dogs Victoria recommends that you continue to learn all you can about genetics and how it affects dogs and dog breeders. There are plenty of online sources for genetic information, but here are a few places to get you started.

An important document for you to read is the Victorian Government's mandatory '[Code of Practice for the Responsible Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease](#)' that applies to all Victorian breeders.

It gives an outline of the inheritance patterns for many of the common serious hereditary diseases and sets rules for the breeding of animals with these.

If you are breeding dogs in Victoria, you **MUST** adhere to these guidelines.

Some other resources include:

The UK Kennel Club's Website has some excellent information about [understanding canine genetics](#).

The American Kennel Club Website also has some excellent information on [genetics for dog breeders](#).

There is also an easy to understand [US-based video](#), however it does contain footage of dogs with cropped ears (which is a *prohibited procedure* here in Australia)

Finally a [TedEd animated video on Mendelian Genetics](#) is available on Youtube.



DV Breeder Series

Breeding Basics – Genetics

DNA Parentage Testing

Parentage testing (often called parentage ‘assurance’) is used by many pedigree registers across a wide variety of species – from racehorses to cattle. It not only promotes confidence in the recorded pedigrees but is also a powerful tool in supporting the elimination or reduction of breed-specific health conditions.

Before the development of DNA parentage testing, incorrect parentage often went undetected unless there was some visible proof (i.e. incorrect colour, visibly atypical shape or size) or genetic health testing results were found in progeny that did not follow accepted inheritance patterns.

The repercussions of pedigree errors can impact generations of animals and entire bloodlines and makes addressing breed specific health problems difficult.

Given that many breeding and purchase decisions are based on the lineage recorded in the pedigree register, you can see that DNA parentage assurance has an important place in all breeding programs.

How does DNA Parentage Testing work?

Parentage testing is based on the understanding that the Sire and Dam of an individual each contribute half of the genetic material found in each of their progeny.

Offspring receive one copy of each gene from each parent as the sperm fertilises the egg.

The genes in each sperm and each egg (‘ovum’) contain a random assortment of those genes found in the parent animal – with millions of possible combinations across the entire gene sequence.

DNA parentage testing is possible because each offspring can **only have genes that are present in their parents**.

A ‘DNA profile’ (often called a DNA fingerprint) is used to compare the DNA sequences at set locations in the puppies to the DNA sequences present at the same locations in the nominated Sire and Dam. These sequences are called ‘markers’.

A series of marker locations are used, and where the markers in the offspring match those of the parents over many different locations, they are said to ‘qualify’ as a parent.

Where the genetic markers in the offspring **do not** contain the same markers present in either the nominated Sire or Dam, then that individual is ‘ruled out’ as a parent.

Parentage Verification required at registration

From 1 January 2026, Dogs Victoria will require breeders to provide a DNA parentage verification result for each puppy at the time of Litter Registration.

A similar requirement has been in place for Dogs Queensland breeders since 2018.

Regulation 4.1.3.1.6

Applications for registration of litters whelped on or after 1 January 2026 will not be processed until Dogs Victoria has received a DNA Parentage Verification Report that qualifies the puppies as being from the Sire and Dam. This requirement applies to registration applications on both the Main and Limited Registers.

Regulation 4.1.3.1.7

The breeder of a litter must ensure that either DNA profiles for both the Sire and Dam are available at the time of mating, or that DNA samples are collected from each parent and submitted for testing no later than the time at which DNA samples from the puppies in that litter are submitted for testing.

Regulation 4.1.3.1.8

In line with the Dogs Australia protocols for DNA testing, DNA sample collection for the purposes of parentage verification must be performed by an approved, independent collector. Identification of the dog by microchip or unique tattoo is required and it must be verified by the approved collector at the time of DNA collection and recorded on the appropriate form.

DNA profiling of puppies will take place once they have been microchipped (positively identified), and the pup’s DNA will be compared to the DNA profiles recorded for the Sire and Dam.

All adult breeding stock will need a DNA profile, and every puppy in the litter needs to be tested, as it is possible in dogs to have more than one sire represented in a single litter – with both intentional and unintentional ‘multiple sire’ litters.

In most cases this will be a fairly simple process, with a DNA profile prepared from a cheek swab, however breeders using frozen semen (especially where the donor sire is deceased) will need to follow special protocols to enable a DNA profile to be generated from the semen sample.

The good news is that the DNA profile will only need to be done once, and will be able to be used in future if a puppy goes on to become a breeding animal.

More information on DNA parentage testing requirements is available on the [Dogs Victoria website](#), under the Breeder tab.

One of the things that set purebred pedigree dogs apart is the recording and documentation of the family tree within the breed for many generations.

If you look at the pedigree papers that came with your female, you will see a three generation family tree listing parents, grandparents and great grandparents in a standard layout and format.

Of course, the family tree extends many generations further back, and there are plenty of breeders who spend hours tracing and recording the ancestors of the dogs within their kennel or breed.

Why study pedigrees?

Studying pedigrees can provide you with a lot of information. There may be health information, colour or coat type information, and the various ancestors listed may have earned 'titles' that will give you an idea of their quality or working ability.

Learning to 'read' and understand pedigrees is a skill that all breeders need to develop. Analysis of the pedigree can help determine the origins of a disease or emerging health issue, can help a breeder narrow down families or lines that might interact well with their own, and can assist with understanding the merits of various animals within their own animal's family.

Having said that, the pedigree only indicates what the animal 'might' be – remember that the best and worst pups in a litter will have exactly the same pedigree, but due to different combinations of genes and gene expression, they may look and behave completely differently. There are also environmental factors such as diet, nutrition levels, training and handling that can influence the underlying genetic potential.

Although all of the animals in an individual's pedigree will have a degree of influence, the first 2 to 3 generations are likely to have the most influence and are therefore most important.

For example, an individual in the 6th generation may only contribute less than 2% of the individual's overall genetic material. Even if they appear multiple times in that 5th or 6th generation, they still may only contribute 2 to 3% of the overall genetic make up of the animal in question. This is due to the somewhat random nature of genetic assortment and the dilution of genes with each generation.

Just because the dog has the all time, top winning herding dog in its pedigree (maybe even several times) does not mean it will sire pups that can herd. If the dog has already sired two or three litters, and not a single puppy has shown any herding instinct, that tells you more than the pedigree does.

What is pedigree analysis?

Pedigree analysis simply means looking at the pedigree to gain information about an individual, their family, or to examine possible breeding combinations.

Important!

Although many breeders place a lot of importance on pedigree when it comes to selecting breeding animals, you need to look at the actual dog in front of you and not just rely on what they are 'on paper'.

There are many dogs with fabulous pedigrees that are not great examples of their breed. There are also plenty of dogs with fabulous pedigrees that are not successful as breeding animals.

Pedigree analysis involves examining the documented family tree and using the information about each individual to determine what that pedigree might contain genetically. This may help you to trace desirable traits within your breed or follow the progression of an undesirable trait or a particular disease.

Pedigree analysis can also be used to assess the level of genetic diversity within an individual and identify any common ancestors that may appear in the pedigree of any proposed mating.

There are quite a number of ways to do pedigree analysis – everything from computer based pedigree programs to simple spreadsheets to hand written diagrams. Like any 'database', they are only as good as the information entered into them!

Because a pedigree is simply a list of ancestors - like your own family tree, you are most likely going to be familiar with (and more likely to have met) ancestors from the first 2 to 3 generations, and you will have plenty of information about them. When you go further back in the pedigree, the individuals may be very old or may have long since passed away, and you are less likely to have met them. You will have to rely on photos or the memories of breeders who have been in the breed for a long time.

For many traits, the information you can gather will be reliable – coat colour, DNA or health testing results that have been submitted to a reliable register, titles earned etc. However, when it comes to researching other traits, you may find that gathering information is a little harder. There will be information on the internet, breed club records, breed books and publications, and in the memories of long time breeders that you may be able to access. It is up to you to ask the questions and collect the information you need.

DV Breeder Series

Breeding Basics - Reading a pedigree

Important!

You need to remember that people's memories of an animal may be clouded by opinion and affected by their relationship to the animal and its owners. Make sure you do your research well, and where possible, get as many opinions as possible.

Keeping breeds healthy

As we have already discussed, all of the breeds we see today result from people breeding animals with similar traits or aptitudes together with the aims of breeding a litter of pups that also had these traits or behaved in a certain way. Usually, quite a small number of individuals from the local population were used over quite a few generations to 'lock in' the traits that the breeder was looking for.

As a result of constantly selecting for things such as size, herding or hunting ability, coat colour or coat texture there was an increase in the homozygosity for specific traits/genes. This had the advantage of producing a reliable style of animal but also risked the increase of recessive traits that may not have been healthy.

Back in those days, breeders would simply cull unhealthy individuals, and animals that were not fit for purpose were removed from the breeding program – the breed either became established or died out. In many cases, an entire breed would be developed at a single kennel or in an isolated area, so the breeding of close relatives was relatively common.

If a problem developed or a breeder needed to introduce a particular trait, it was not uncommon to go 'outside' the kennel and breed to any individual with the desirable trait. There were no 'rules' in place that restricted the use of other 'breeds' or individuals; the focus was on function and personal preference.

Note:

If you look at the history of your breed, you will probably find some information about the development of the breed and its key breeders. Most breeds were developed in a region or area where there was a set of attributes required for success at a particular task – for example, physical attributes that assisted with negotiating the terrain.

For other breeds, their history revolves around a large kennel where the breeder had a particular preference for colour, size or a behavioural trait that was important to them.

When the 'Pedigree Registers' were developed, and breed standards were written, there was a move to 'closed' gene pools. This meant that it was no longer permissible to breed animals who were not registered as the same breed if you wanted to have the resulting progeny recorded on the pedigree register.

This presented breeders with a new challenge – how to keep their breed healthy (both physically and genetically) over time, within the limitations of breeding only within the existing population of animals.

Clever breeders were well aware of the effects of breeding animals that were too closely related, even if they did not understand the actual genetics behind it. Because they had large kennels and bred large numbers of litters, they were able to see which combinations produced the best animals and which combinations produced disease, poor fertility, lower birth rates, or other undesirable traits.

These days, with the advances in genetic technology, there are a host of tools that can be used to reduce the risks of breeding animals that may not be compatible and the ability to access genetic diversity through the use of reproductive technology. However, it is still up to the breeder to ensure they consider genetic diversity when selecting breeding animals.

Inbreeding, line breeding and outcrossing – what do they mean?

'Inbreeding' - is the breeding of closely related individuals. It is usually defined in modern times as 'first generation matings' - the breeding of brother to sister, father to daughter or mother to son, or those who have many common ancestors in the first 1 to 2 generations.

Inbreeding increases the risk of the progeny being homozygous for many traits as there is far less genetic variability possible. Increased homozygosity can lead to the expression of adverse recessive traits such as disease and can lead to a general depression of health and fertility.

'Line Breeding' - is technically a form of inbreeding. There is a lot of debate and speculation about what is considered line breeding and what is inbreeding, and it depends on who you are talking to. Line breeding is generally defined as breeding animals who have common ancestors within the first 3 to 4 generations.

Line breeding aims to 'lock in' all of the parents' desirable traits (by increasing the level of homozygosity) whilst avoiding the depressive effects seen when the individuals are more closely related.

'Outcrossing' – An 'outcross' is a mating of two 'unrelated' individuals. This is loosely defined as not having any common ancestors for at least six generations. Within many breeds, an outcross may still include common ancestors further back in the pedigree and therefore may technically be a diluted form of line breeding – it's all about the definitions.

Outcrossing is generally done to introduce a desirable trait or introduce hybrid vigour; however, it does not guarantee healthier or higher quality animals. The genetic assortment seen in 'unrelated' animals can introduce new diseases into a population or result in the homozygosity for unwanted traits that were not visible in the two unrelated individuals or populations.

The breeder's role in genetic diversity

Inbreeding and purebred dogs is a very topical issue – with many animal welfare groups calling for the opening of closed gene pools to address severe breed specific health issues. There is also the promotion of 'cross bred' animals as being healthier or even 'free of disease', which of course, is not true.

As a breeder, it is up to you to make considered decisions when choosing your breeding animals. The level of inbreeding and associated health issues in your breed will direct some of your choices, as will the size of the potential gene pool.

There are rules prohibiting certain combinations, and there are tools to help you assess the level of inbreeding, both within the breed and within an individual or combination.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.14.1 states:

First generation breeding (eg father / daughter; brother / sister; mother / son) matings are not permitted.

The progeny of any matings that are not permitted by 20.1.14.1 will be registered on the Limited Register and endorsed "never to be upgraded". It will be a breach of Code 20.1.14 by the member/s who are the owners of the sire and dam of the litter constituting an offence against Dogs Victoria Rules, Regulations and Codes

The more advanced pedigree software programs allow breeders to calculate several numeric or statistical values relating to genetic diversity. The most commonly used one is 'Wright's Coefficient of Inbreeding', which is calculated using ten or more generations. The inbreeding coefficient is a numerical representation of the relatedness of the mother and father of the litter.

It is important to remember that the inbreeding coefficient is simply indicative of risk – it is not an indicator of health or disease status. It is simply another tool breeders can use when considering the parents of their litter.

The UK Kennel Club has an excellent article on this topic that you can read: www.thekennelclub.org.uk/health-and-dog-care/health/getting-started-with-health-testing-and-screening/inbreeding-calculators/

There is also an excellent article on '[Pedigree Analysis and How Breeding Decisions Affect Genes](#)' by Dr Jerold Bell that explains the concept of genetic diversity from a breeder's perspective.



DV Breeder Series

Health testing for breeding

As a Dogs Victoria breeder, your goal is to produce healthy, happy puppies that are excellent examples of their breed, both in looks and temperament. To do this, you are aiming to not only produce puppies that are true to their breed standard but who are as free as possible from inherited diseases or conditions that could impact the welfare of the animal during its lifetime.

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. Defective genes that cause disease are present in **all** animals – even humans - but often, the only time that the disease is seen is when both the mother and the father carry the same defect.

Breeders of purebred dogs are usually very aware of potential health problems that are seen in their breeds (and certain lines within the breed) and make sure they reduce the risks of passing on these diseases by health testing any potential breeding animals before they go on to produce puppies. This means that the risk of the disease occurring is minimised through good breeding practices.

Important!

It is your role as a breeder to carefully select the parents of your litters so that you are working to both preserve the breed and improve it – with each generation healthier than the last.

To achieve this, you need to be aware of any potential health issues that are common to your breed and make sure you undertake every step to prevent perpetuating problems for future generations.

Responsible breeding involves testing any potential breeding animals and making informed and considered breeding decisions with the health and welfare of both the parents and the pups as a priority.

How will I know the health issues that may affect my breed?

Having an awareness of the potential health issues that affect your breed is vital if you plan on breeding. Nobody wants to produce puppies with health issues that may have been prevented, and, as a breeder, you are responsible (both morally and legally) for every puppy you breed.

Before you begin breeding, you need to spend some time doing health based research. You want to have an understanding of the potential health conditions that may affect your breeding program and your breeding choices. You will want to understand how these diseases are inherited or passed on, their signs and symptoms, and the consequences for the affected individuals - both short and long term.

Where there are testing or screening options available, you want to understand when this should occur, the type of test, and how to use the results to direct and inform your breeding choices. That way, you can select healthy breeding animals and make sure that your proposed combinations compliment each other to minimise the risks of disease.

Dogs Victoria Regulations 20.3.2 states:

- *Members will take responsible action to reduce the incidence of hereditary diseases in their breeds.*
- *Where there is a control program, approved by Dogs Victoria, covering a breed for a disease known or considered to be inherited, then breeders within the breed should participate and comply with the requirements of the program.*

Breed Club websites

A great place to start your health research is to visit your Breed's Club websites – both Australian and International. These breed club websites draw together years of information from breeders and breed guardians and present it in a format that is usually easy to read and understand. Many clubs have whole sections of the website dedicated to health and welfare, as well as advice to people looking to add a member of that breed to their family.

Breed Clubs will often set minimum testing standards for their members, and some provide open access databases of health testing results that you can study. Some of the larger breed clubs also offer 'testing days' where they will arrange for a Specialist Veterinarian to conduct testing for members, often at a reduced rate, or arrange for DNA sample collection with an approved collector.

Canine health databases

There are several online canine health databases that aim to collate and list known health issues by breed.

These are excellent resources and are generally overseen by university researchers, veterinarians or the larger kennel clubs.

If you are looking at an internationally based database, it is important to remember that not all diseases are seen in all populations of a breed - for example; an issue seen in a few individuals of a breed in Europe and reported on a health database may not exist in individuals in Australia, the UK or the USA.

DV Breeder Series

Health testing for breeding

Some useful Databases to look at include:

[Orthopaedic Foundation For Animals](#)

This is an extensive American based database that hosts a variety of test results and information about health testing. You can search by breed and view detailed pedigrees for animals whose owners have submitted health testing results.

Although initially set up to record hip dysplasia screening results, the OFA website now lists results over a considerable number of testing protocols and diseases.

[The Kennel Club Website](#)

The UK Kennel Club website has a whole section of its website dedicated to health. There is also a searchable breed index linking to detailed information about the breed and its care. Each breed page has a 'Health' section that lists all of the recognised health issues for the breed along with suggested testing requirements.

[Canine Inherited Disorders Database](#)

This is a university based database hosted in Canada and supported by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. Information is accessed through a breed search and lists important, common and less common conditions that may affect each breed.

Be aware that this database's last major update appears to be in 2011, so the information may be a little dated.

Your mentors

Another excellent source of information about breed health concerns is your mentors and other established breeders. A lot of health information relating to individual families within your breed may not be publically available through health testing results. Breeders and exhibitors who have been involved in your breed for a long time will have information about dogs they have known or have used in their breeding programs over the years.

Sometimes asking some discreet questions may result in you learning specific information about dogs within the pedigrees or families you are planning on breeding.

Your mentors may also be able to assist with information about how you should go about having samples for health testing collected and where to send them.

Your veterinarian

Your veterinarian is another excellent source of information. Your veterinarian will be able to answer specific questions relating to your animals' health and discuss their suitability for breeding.

They will have access to scientific publications and information about specific diseases and will be able to explain the health and welfare consequences of the various diseases as they deal with these on a daily basis.

What types of tests do you need to consider?

Not every health issue or disease has a specific test or screening program. Where there is a test available, you need to understand when and how the test is conducted and what the results will mean for your breeding program.

There are collection and identification protocols that Dogs Australia has outlined to ensure that test results are 'accurate and credible'.

DNA collection

- » *DNA collection is by approved, independent, trained collectors, including veterinarians.*
- » *Owners/breeders cannot collect from their own dogs.*
- » *Approved collectors would be those accepted by State Controlling Bodies or nominated by breed clubs.*

Positive identification

- » *Identification of the dog by microchip or unique (as part of a recognised Australia wide based tattoo system) tattoo is required, it must be verified by the collector at the time of DNA collection and recorded on the form.*

Positive identification at the time of testing is important to prevent mistakes or the deliberate falsification of results. Every health test result should clearly show the individual's microchip number as part of the identifying information, and prior to any sample being collected or test being conducted, the individual's microchip should be scanned.

General veterinary examination and testing

All breeding animals should undergo a thorough veterinary health examination as part of their breeding suitability and health assessment. In fact, it is part of the Dogs Victoria's Code of Practice requirements for breeding animal health management that your breeding animals undergo a veterinary health check at least once each year.

A veterinary health check will involve a full physical examination, along with any other testing that might be indicated. This may include blood, urine or faecal testing to check for disease or changes within the body that might indicate that a health issue exists.

If you are planning your bitch's first litter, she will need a 'Clearance to Commence Breeding' certificate from your veterinarian to certify that she has reached adequate maturity for breeding and that she has no apparent defects or pathology that would preclude her from breeding.

Dogs Victoria has a template '[Clearance to Commence Breeding](#)' certificate that you can use, or your veterinarian may choose to use their own format.

DV Breeder Series

Health testing for breeding

If she has had litters previously, you may want to discuss her medical history to ensure that any previous conditions will not impact her suitability for future breeding.

Remember:

Although some diseases are caused by external factors such as bacteria, viruses or parasites, many conditions have an underlying genetic, conformation or behavioural component that you might have to consider. Examples of this may be chronic ear disease, skin allergies, food allergies and 'bloat'.

Where your bitch has had an accident or injury, you should consider if there might be a genetic or conformation component that contributed to the injury or whether the damage caused could lead to problems with carrying a litter or whelping a litter of pups even though it has healed.

DNA testing

DNA testing is considered the 'gold standard' in regards to determining an individual's genetic disease status as it does not require any subjective assessment. DNA testing is now one of the most common testing techniques used. Tests have been developed for many of the significant health issues affecting the various breeds.

Tests are developed by identifying sequences or markers in the DNA code that are linked to a specific trait or disease. A sample of DNA is taken from the individual being tested and examined for the presence or absence of these sequences or markers. The most common sampling techniques involve taking a cheek swab (collecting cells from the lining of the mouth) or extracting DNA from a sample of blood.

Because an individual's DNA is constant throughout life, DNA tests can be used at a very young age to determine the status of an individual in regards to a trait or disease, and the result will not change over time.

Depending on the disease's mode of inheritance, DNA testing can indicate animals that are 'clear' of the genes for that particular disease or trait, those which may 'carry' the disease or trait (but not show any signs) and those that are 'affected'.

It is important to remember that for many diseases and health issues, the expression of the underlying genetic 'potential' may be linked to other factors, so you need to make sure you understand what the DNA test results mean before making any decisions in relation to an individual's suitability to breed.

Just because an animal is a 'carrier' for a disease, does not mean that they cannot be bred from, especially if they have other attributes that are highly desirable in the breed, or are clear of other health issues.

Being a breeder often involves weighing up a whole host of factors - disease status, temperament, working ability etc.- before selecting which animals should be bred together. If all carriers of a disease are suddenly removed from the population, it is highly likely that other problems will emerge, or the genes for some highly desirable traits will be permanently lost from the gene pool as a consequence.

Breeding of animals that are carriers for a disease but who are exceptional in other ways can be done, but care must be taken to ensure that they are only bred to a partner who is genetically 'clear' of that same disease. Knowledge of disease status is an important tool in the breeder's decision making process.

Important!

If you plan to breed a dog or bitch who is 'clear by parentage' for a disease, you should still consider having them tested prior to breeding to confirm this result. Alternatively, you can have the animal's parentage confirmed by DNA profile.

Many breeders over the years have been caught out when they have based entire breeding programs on individuals who later turned out to be carriers of a disease due to test result/sample errors or incorrect parentage.

Screening programs

There are, of course, many traits or diseases that are the result of the interaction of many genes (polygenic) and those where the expression of the disease is directly influenced by other non genetic factors (such as diet or exercise). In this case DNA testing is not helpful.

For traits or diseases with more complex inheritance and expression, health testing may involve 'screening programs' that look for the existence of *actual disease symptoms* in the affected organ or tissue.

The results of these type of tests may change over time and often require reassessment at regular intervals during the animal's life for them to continue to be certified 'clear' of the disease. Others may require the animal to reach a certain age or developmental milestone to be correctly assessed.

Examples of screening programs include the examination of the eye (and surrounding structures) for disease or degenerative changes over time, assessing individuals for the presence of signs or symptoms of heart disease, or the grading of changes to the anatomical structure of the joints and bone of the hips, elbows or spine. It also includes tests such as the respiratory function grading in brachycephalic breeds which looks at actual respiratory function rather than just anatomy.

Important!

*If you are planning to make breeding choices based on the results of screening tests, they should be undertaken by a **specialist veterinarian** using the correct equipment rather than a general practitioner.*

In the case of screening techniques using radiographs (x ray), such as hip, elbow or spinal scoring, your regular veterinarian will be the one to take the radiograph, but a specialist should be the one to read or score it.

DV Breeder Series

Health testing for breeding

Code of Practice requirements

State government requirements

All breeders of dogs and cats in Victoria must abide by the [Code of Practice for the Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease](#), which is a mandatory (legally enforceable) Code that forms part of the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986**.

'This Code aims to educate animal breeders how to best minimise or avoid the development of heritable disease in progeny caused by inappropriate selection and mating of animals with heritable (genetic) defects. It also outlines breeding practices that will assist the reduction of the prevalence of the heritable defect in the animal population.'

This Code of Practice gives advice to ALL breeders on preventing heritable defects but is considered MANDATORY for those breeders who have breeds affected by the following diseases:

- » Von Willebrand's Disease (VWD)
- » Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- » Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (NCL)
- » Collie Eye Anomaly (CEA/CH)
- » Hereditary Cataract (HC)

You can access a copy of the Code via the [Animal Welfare Victoria](#) website, and regardless of your breed, this document provides some excellent information about genetics and selection of breeding animals to prevent disease.

Dogs Australia and Dogs Victoria Codes of Practice

Dogs Australia has a national 'Code of Practice for Hereditary Diseases', which applies to all Dogs Australia members. This Code can be accessed at dogsaustralia.org.au/about-dogs-australia/codes-of-practice

The Dogs Australia Code has been incorporated into the Dogs Victoria Code of Practice for Hereditary Diseases (Regulations 20.3). The most up to date version of the Dogs Victoria Regulations can be accessed at via the [Dogs Victoria](#) website



Mandatory testing for registration of litters of certain breeds

Some breeds have mandatory health testing requirements – called *litter registration limitations* – under the Dogs Australia rules.

Dogs Australia defines a Litter Registration Limitation as:

"..... mandatory requirements that are applied to the sire and dam of a litter of puppies prior to being able to register that litter. The "limitation" is some form of disease screening process that has been voted on and agreed to by the particular breed community, through the input of registered owners and/or breeders, State Breed Clubs and National Breed Councils."

A list of breeds with litter registration limitations can be found in the [Dogs Australia Regulations Part 6-Section 8](#) and currently affect the following breeds:

Bedlington Terrier	Australian Shepherd
Flat Coated Retriever	German Shepherd Dog
Golden Retriever	Bullmastiff
Labrador Retriever	Rottweiler
Afghan Hound	Dobermann

Responsibility to the breed

For your chosen breed to remain healthy and viable into the future, all breeders need to be open and honest about health issues they encounter. Breeders need to share information about the health of their animals and report any conditions or diseases they see emerging. This may be hard to do at times, as the identification of a hereditary disease may completely decimate your breeding program. Still, it needs to happen for the betterment and health of the breed as a whole.

The more litters you have, and the longer you are a breeder, the more likely problems will crop up. Sometimes, despite selecting very carefully, doing every test available at the time, and making considered breeding choices, health issues will still occur. It is essential to learn from these events and go back and reconsider the parents and immediate family's breeding suitability.

As a breeder, you should actively seek information about the ongoing health of all of the puppies you produce. Most breeders have a clause in their contracts that insists that any health issues be reported to them by the new owners, even into the animal's senior years. With information, breeders can make informed decisions; without it, breeding is just guesswork.

Breeding is both a science and an art, but you should always have health and welfare at the top of your selection criteria. Considered breeding choices that are informed by proper health testing will ensure that you can capture the very best traits of an individual whilst stepping closer to disease eradication with every generation.

DV Breeder Series

Selecting breeding stock

As a breeder, one of the most important roles you play will be the selection of breeding animals. The decisions you make can have ongoing consequences both for the puppies you produce and for further generations. Your choices can also influence your entire experience of breeding, whelping and rearing a litter.

You want to produce the healthiest puppies that you can, ones that are excellent examples of your breed. Pups that go on to have long, happy lives and who can perform the tasks that the breed was bred for.

The first step will be to make an assessment of your breeding female – making sure that she is both healthy and a good example of the breed. You will then have to assess the available males to find a healthy stud dog who best complements your female in terms of her virtues and faults.

You want as much information as you can to help guide and direct your breeding choices. This may include looking at the families of the individuals you plan to breed, researching pedigrees, collating health test results, and learning to critically assess individual animals against a set of criteria designed to help you reach your breeding goals. Never let it be said that breeding is easy!

Start with the best breeding female that you can

When you are new to breeding dogs, your aim should be to learn as much as you can about your breed, about breed health issues, temperament and about function. You should aim to start with the best bitch that you can and look to finding a male dog who best complements her strength and weaknesses.

Very few breeders start their breeding program with a 'Best In Show' or 'High in Trial' winning bitch. Instead, most will begin with an 'honest' bitch that was sold to them as a family pet and who has grown into a pleasing example of the breed.

Ideally, your foundation bitch should be of a quality and have sufficient merit to make her worthy of being bred. Merely wanting to have a litter 'so the kids can experience the miracle of birth' or because your girl is 'adorable' or 'cost a fortune', should not override the objective assessment of her positive attributes.

Remember:

Half of every pup's genetic make up comes from the mother, so it does not matter how amazing your selected sire is, he cannot magically make up for serious flaws or faults in your bitch.

Although you will most likely already have a female, if she is a poor example of the breed, you may find that you are better off leasing or purchasing a quality bitch specifically for the purposes of breeding. Many new breeders spend generations trying to get to the place they might have started had they sourced a different foundation bitch, so take your time and choose wisely.

Your mentor should be able to advise and assist you in this regard.

Objective assessment of merit and suitability for breeding

There are many factors you should consider when deciding whether an individual dog or bitch should become a breeding animal. You will want to think about their conformation, general health, temperament, results of breed specific health tests, and working ability or instinct.

One of the best ways to evaluate breeding stock objectively is to work through a list of attributes and document them individually for each animal before deciding whether the animal could improve in that area or if that feature is a particular strength.

Working through a list of attributes in a consistent way makes comparing and contrasting animals much easier and makes the assessment far less emotional. This will become increasingly important when it comes to matching up breeding animals in a way that ensures they complement each other.

Health and welfare considerations

Health and welfare considerations should always be at the top of the list when selecting or assessing breeding animals.

General health and welfare

Any animals considered for potential breeding should be fit, well, and healthy. They should be at the correct body condition score (not too fat or too thin), and they should be receiving all the required preventative health care and nutrition needed to ensure they are at their prime when it comes to the actual mating and pregnancy.

In breeds where conformation may be linked to health issues, you want to make sure that you avoid exaggeration and extremes that might have severe welfare implications. In breeds where coat colour is linked to health issues, you want to avoid breeding colour combinations that increase the risks of disease.

Note:

*The Dogs Australia Regulations - Part 6 lists several **prohibited** colour combinations such as merle to merle and dapple to dapple with puppies from these combinations not eligible for registration due to the health implications of these combinations.*

Screening and testing for known breed health issues

All potential breeding animals should undergo testing for any known breed health issues before being included in any breeding program. This testing needs to be conducted in accordance with accepted protocols, utilising reputable testing laboratories, and all results should be paired with the individual animal's microchip number.

Eye and heart clearances need to be performed by veterinarians who are Registered Specialists in these areas. Where testing is required to be repeated at intervals (such as yearly examinations), the most recent certification needs to be 'current'.

You will want to consider the outcomes of any health testing or screening carefully and understand the implications of the results. In most cases, the information obtained will be used to inform and direct your breeding choices, particularly when it comes to the selection of breeding partners.

There will, however, be some results that will mean an individual animal is never going to be suitable for breeding or is no longer suitable for breeding and needs to be removed from the breeding population.

Next, assess the individual against your breed standard

When breeding purebred dogs, the goal should always be to breed to the accepted breed standard. The breed standard describes the breed's history and purpose and gives a technical written description of the perfect specimen - a 'blueprint' of the ideal dog.

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, 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.

You will need to understand the terminology used in the breed standard and learn how that translates into assessing the animal in front of you. This is where your mentors can be a great help. They will have years of experience and should be able to help explain or demonstrate what it is that the breed standard is referring to.

You might also want to look at the breed standard *extension*, which is designed to clarify areas of the standard that may not be easy to understand and often contains illustrations that help visualise the different areas of conformation.

Consider temperament, working ability and instinct

Behavioural attributes are just as heritable as other traits and right up there with health and welfare in terms of importance. Having the most beautiful example of your breed is no good if the dog is so anxious that it bites people or harms itself.

When assessing suitability for breeding, you want to ensure that the individual has the correct temperament for the breed and does not have any behavioural issues that may impact its health and wellbeing.

Avoid animals that are highly fearful, anxious or aggressive – even if this is only in certain situations (e.g. thunderstorms or when left alone). The ideal breeding animal is calm, confident and outgoing. They have been well socialised and had some basic manners training and are a joy to be around.

Remember:

The mother of the litter has a significant impact on the temperament of the pups as her influence extends beyond her genetic input.

Her behaviour during the pregnancy, at birth, and during the feeding and rearing stages has a life long impact on the temperament of the puppies.

If you are breeding for working ability or instinct, then you will also want to select individuals who excel in these areas. This may be demonstrated by titles in various dog 'sports' or in actual day to day working ability in the field.

Finally, consider reproductive attributes

Mothering behaviour and litter size are both influenced by the 'dam' line. When choosing a breeding female, you should always look for one that came from a large litter, was whelped naturally, and whose mother (and even grandmother) was a 'good mother'.

Having a bitch who whelps easily and has excellent mothering instincts will help make your breeding experience a little easier.

By selecting for easy whelping and large litter size, you will help reduce the risks of whelping difficulties in subsequent litters and generations. Of course, there are many other factors that will influence whether or not you run into problems, but you will certainly reduce the risks.

DV Breeder Series

Selecting breeding stock

Write it down

Developing a spreadsheet or workbook with a space to describe your 'ideal' and space to describe whether you consider a particular attribute as a strength or weakness for each animal can take the emotion out of making an assessment. A spreadsheet can help document the important traits in the same way for every potential breeding animal, making comparisons easier.

If you are using a spreadsheet, a good idea is to have a column for each individual part of the breed standard so you can then focus on one physical attribute at a time. You can also record health testing results and even make notes about family members, progeny, and temperament.



The following is an example of part of a spreadsheet assessing some Labrador Retriever males:

Dogs Name	Breed Standard Ideal			Health Testing		Temperament & Working Ability	
	Eyes	Feet	Size	Hip Score	PRA- prcd	Working Titles	Temperament
	Medium size, expressing intelligence and good temper; brown or hazel	Round, compact; well arched toes and well developed pads	Ideal Height at withers Dog 56 - 57 cms (22-22.5ins)	Current Breed Average = 9 Total	Progressive Retinal Atrophy - progressive rod cone degeneration (DNA Test)	Retrieving, Obedience, Tracking etc.	Notes on Observed or Known Temperament Issues
Spike	Dark Brown Eye, eye size correct	Feet a little flat	21 inches	2:3=5	Clear	CDX, TD	
Harry	Light Eye, eye size correct	Correct Round compact feet	23 inches	10:1=11	Clear	NRD	Litter brother has severe noise phobia
Sam	Brown Eye, eyes a bit small	Correct Round compact feet	22 inches	1:0=1	Carrier	None	
Morris	Hazel Eye, eye correct size	Correct Round compact feet	24.5 inches	4:5=9	Clear	UD, TCh, RATG	

As you can see, each dog has strengths and weaknesses in the different physical attributes and their health clearances. This is what you will find – regardless of your breed. No animal is perfect in every way. There is always something you could work to improve!

Selecting the best stud dog for your bitch

Now that you have completed all of the assessments, it is time to select the stud dog that you plan to use.

You will have a list now of all of your bitch's strengths and weaknesses, and you are looking to complement these in your selection of a sire. You need to look for a sire who not only excels in the areas that you are hoping to improve, but preferably one that has shown he can produce this improvement in his progeny.

Your mentor may provide you with some guidance in this area, and if they are involved in your breed, should have an excellent knowledge of the various stud dogs available.

Remember:

Don't just use a dog because he is 'convenient' or because your girl's breeder has offered you a 'free service' to one of their dogs. Do your homework and try to select the best male for your female, regardless of where he is located or who owns him.

The best advice is to consider stud dogs from all over the country or the state. If your breed has low numbers, you may want to consider dogs from around the world. Luckily with modern breeding technology, you have the ability to access reproductive material from pretty much anywhere in the world!

If the dog has been used at stud already, take the time to look at the progeny he is producing. This is more important in some ways than the dog himself. He might be the biggest winning, most amazing dog you have ever seen, but if his progeny are average, and he does not 'produce' well, then you might be better with another sire.

Remember:

Although there will undoubtedly be high profile stud dogs being shown or trialed in your breed, there are many other males that may be available. These may be up and coming dogs, dogs that are not shown, or older males that have now retired from active competition.

Make sure that you visit breeder websites, look carefully at stud dog listings and talk to breeders (including those that your breeder may not have a lot to do with!).

Look at the pedigrees of dogs you admire, and try to find any common family groups that might mesh well with your bitch's pedigree.

Next, you should prepare a short list of potential males and sit down with your mentor and assess them as you have done with your bitch. Make a comparison. Try to narrow it down to one or two males that best compliment your girl and her strengths and weaknesses.



DV Breeder Series

Selecting breeding stock

Using the male Labrador Retrievers from the previous example:

Dogs Name	Breed Standard Ideal			Health Testing		Temperament & Working Ability	
	Eyes	Feet	Size	Hip Score	PRA- prcd	Working Titles	Temperament
	Medium size, expressing intelligence and good temper; brown or hazel	Round, compact; well arched toes and well developed pads	Ideal Height at withers Dog 56 - 57 cms (22-22.5ins)	Current Breed Average = 9 Total	Progressive Retinal Atrophy - progressive rod cone degeneration (DNA Test)	Retrieving, Obedience, Tracking etc.	Notes on Observed or Known Temperament Issues
Spike	Dark Brown Eye, eye size correct	Feet a little flat	21 inches	2:3=5	Clear	CDX, TD	
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If we look at the evaluations recorded for the four 'short listed' Labrador stud dogs, we can see that each of them have some excellent breed points as well as some areas that you would prefer to improve.

If you had a bitch that had been tested as a PRA prcd **carrier** – you would immediately have to remove the dog 'Sam' from consideration due to him also being a carrier of this disease. If you had a bitch who had tested **clear** for the genes for PRA prcd, you would have the choice of all four of these potential stud dogs.

You would then start to put your own priorities on the things that you needed to improve. No matter which dog you use, there will need to be some compromise, and it really does depend on your bitch and your breeding objectives.

For example, if your bitch was a little on the tall side, had a lighter eye, but had excellent feet, great working ability and a hip score close to the breed average, 'Spike' may be the best match.

If she was a little on the small side, had a lovely dark eye and a super low hip score, and you were looking to improve working ability, you might want to use Morris.

...this is where the 'art' of the breeder lies - finding the dog that best matches your objectives and your breeding female....

Finally, once you have selected your preferred male, you will need to contact his owner to discuss their terms and conditions, and to do your **'due diligence'**.

You will want to make sure that you sight copies or originals of all of the dog's health testing results, and ensure that he is up to date with any screening requirements. You don't want to base your decisions on health screening that is years out of date, to find that you have already bred your bitch to a male who now has signs of disease.

You will also want to confirm that he is registered on the **main register** (blue pedigree papers) and therefore eligible for breeding. You will also need to ensure that all of the dog's registered owners are current members of their state controlling body.

Many new breeders have been caught out when they have gone to register their litter only to find that the dog is not eligible for breeding, or his owners have let their membership lapse.

Next you want to confirm his availability, stud fees, and conditions. You may find that you will not be able to access the male of your choice, or maybe the stud agreement's conditions are not to your liking. In this case, you may choose to look elsewhere and go to your second choice of male.

You want to make sure you are clear on all of the Stud Dog owner's terms – When is the stud fee payable? What happens if your bitch does not get pregnant? Will there be the need for travel or boarding? Do they have the facilities to house or board your bitch at their property if she needs to stay? Will they supervise the mating themselves, or will you need to use a veterinarian and potentially artificial insemination techniques?

Ideally, they will have a written 'Stud' contract for you to read and agree to. Having the conditions written down and agreed to means that both parties are protected and that no misunderstandings can occur.

Now you have locked in your preferred stud dog, you will have to wait patiently until your bitch is ready to mate...



DOGS
VICTORIA
YOUR CANINE COMMUNITY

Section 3

Breeding Your Litter

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Normal reproductive anatomy and physiology

Part of being a knowledgeable breeder involves learning about and understanding both the anatomy and the physiology of the canine reproductive system.

You will need to have a basic idea of normal anatomy and function so that you will know what to look for and expect when it comes time to breed your bitch. You will also want to learn all the correct terminology so that you can talk to other breeders, your veterinarian and the owner of the stud dog in a meaningful way.

Being aware of the timing of events and the subtle changes that may indicate your bitch may be coming into season means you should have every opportunity to have a successful mating. It will also mean that you will notice when things are not right, allowing you to seek advice early.

Normal reproductive anatomy of the female

When puppies are born, they already have all of their reproductive organs; they are just not developed. As the puppy grows and approaches puberty, the various organs begin to produce the hormones that control reproduction. The organs mature, and the animal becomes ready to reproduce.

The reproductive tract in the female consists of:

- » A pair of ovaries
- » The oviducts - which join the ovaries to the uterus
- » The uterus (or 'womb') - which is separated into two long 'horns' that join together to form the uterine 'body' near the cervix
- » The Cervix – which acts as the barrier between the vagina and the uterus
- » The Vagina
- » The Vulva – the externally visible opening of the vagina

The Mammary glands also form part of the reproductive system.

Externally, you can only see the teats and the vulva, and these may be well covered with hair in some breeds.

Normal physiology of the female reproductive cycle

Female canids only ovulate once each cycle (called 'mono oestrus'). Their reproductive cycle continues from puberty to death – they do not undergo any form of menopause.

Generally, maximum fertility occurs around the 2nd, 3rd and 4th seasons (around three years of age).

The normal female cycle

The female reproductive cycle in the dog consists of four different stages:

Pro-oestrus – the 'getting ready' part of the cycle.

During this phase, you will notice changes in your bitch's behaviour, swelling of her vulva and the onset of a bloody discharge. She will become attractive to male dogs and may be quite 'flirty' with them, but she will not allow them to mate her. Pro-oestrus usually lasts about nine days (but can be anywhere from 3 to 21 days).

Oestrus – this is the part of the season where the bitch is sexually receptive and when ovulation occurs.

The discharge seen becomes less profuse and more of a straw colour, and the vulva becomes larger and softer. Oestrus is often defined as extending from the first day that the bitch will stand and allow a male dog to mount her through to the day she no longer accepts the male. The length of the oestrus part of the cycle is usually around nine days (but can be anywhere from 3 to 17 days).

Note:

Together the 'pro-oestrus' and 'oestrus' stages are usually referred to as a 'season'.

The average season lasts around 2 to 3 weeks (although it can be anywhere from a few days to a month), after which the bitch will enter di-oestrus and anoestrus.

Di-oestrus/Meta-oestrus – This period last for around 60 days after the end of the oestrus period.

There can be two different outcomes in the female dog – the first is where she has been mated and becomes pregnant, the other is where she was not mated, or the mating was unsuccessful. If she is not pregnant, she will enter a pseudo-pregnant state as the hormonal changes are basically the same whether the bitch is pregnant or not.

Anoestrus – The anoestrus phase is the 'resting' phase between seasons and is accompanied by an extended period of ovarian inactivity.

Normal reproductive anatomy and physiology

When can I expect my bitch to have her first season?

Most young bitches will have their first oestrus (season) around the age of 8 to 10 months of age. Of course, this varies with the size of the dog – with smaller and toy breeds reaching puberty earlier (around 6 to 8 months of age) and giant breeds taking much longer (anywhere up to 2 years of age).

It is not uncommon for a bitch's first season to be irregular with 'silent seasons' (no external evidence of a season) and 'split seasons' (where the bitch will bleed for a few days then stop, then around six weeks later bleed again) both quite common.

The swelling of the vulva may also be far less dramatic than that seen in older bitches when they cycle.

Important!

If you are new to breeding and do not know what you should be looking for, ask your veterinarian, mentor, or an experienced breeder to show you.

Although it is possible for a bitch to fall pregnant and whelp a litter at her first season, her reproductive tract may not yet be fully developed, and there may not have been time to fully assess her disease and health status. For this reason, there are rules relating to 'adequate maturity' to encourage responsible breeding.

There is a breed listing in the Dogs Victoria Regulations with accepted minimum breeding ages declared for many breeds, which you should be familiar with. You will also need to be aware of any health testing requirements for your breed and the timing of these.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.12 states:

A member shall not breed with a bitch unless they have reached adequate maturity for that breed as determined by Dogs Victoria, without the prior approval of Dogs Victoria. Where the Rules, Regulations and Codes of Practice are otherwise silent, the minimum age for breeding a bitch shall be 12 months.

How often will she cycle?

The time between seasons varies quite widely – both between breeds and between individual bitches. The average time between seasons being around 6 to 7 months. Primitive breeds (such as Basenji) may only cycle once a year, and cycles ranging from 4 to 5 months to 15 months are all considered quite normal.

One important thing to note is that each individual bitch will most likely cycle at the same interval throughout her life. Keeping records of each season will be very useful in predicting the timing of the next cycle or for detecting potential issues that may cause the interval length to change.

Each season's duration is also highly repeatable for the individual, so noting the days where your bitch seemed receptive or when her discharge started and stopped can help you prepare for subsequent seasons.

What is pseudo-pregnancy?

Pseudo-pregnancy (or phantom pregnancy) occurs due to the unique hormonal cycling that occurs in the bitch. Regardless of whether she was mated or not, if she does not fall pregnant during a cycle, the bitch will enter a period of pseudo-pregnancy during dioestrus due to the effects of the hormone Progesterone. It can affect different bitches in different ways.

For some bitches, there may be physical signs such as weight gain, increased appetite, mammary gland development or even milk production. For others, the changes may relate to their behaviour. They may become withdrawn, clingy or moody. They may begin nesting behaviours or take on inanimate objects as their 'pups'. This mothering type behaviour can extend to displaying maternal aggression if she feels her 'pups' are threatened.

The signs of pseudo-pregnancy usually resolve on their own as this part of the cycle ends, but there are some associated risks such as pyometra (uterine infection) and mastitis (mammary gland infection) that can occur during this time.



Normal reproductive anatomy and physiology

Important!

If the symptoms of pseudo-pregnancy in your bitch are particularly severe, please consult your veterinarian for advice.

Normal reproductive anatomy of the male

The reproductive tract of the male includes:

- » The Scrotum – which houses and provides for temperature regulation of the testes
- » The Testes - which are responsible for sperm production and the production of the male hormone testosterone
- » The Epididymis – which stores the sperm and is where the sperm mature
- » The Spermatic cords which contain the spermatic ducts (joining the epididymis to the urethra), nerves and blood supply to the testes
- » The Prostate – which produces the fluid part of the semen
- » The Penis – including the os penis, bulbus glandis, glans penis and urethra
- » The Prepuce – which covers the penis when it is not erect

Normally, the testes will have descended into the scrotum well before puppies are six weeks of age. However, in some of the smaller and toy breeds, it may take a little longer. Prior to puberty, the testes remain small, but as they begin to produce the hormone testosterone, they will start to enlarge as sperm production begins.

Important!

Although it is possible for a male with only one testicle descended to sire a litter, this trait is considered a serious fault and a hereditary defect. You should only use a male dog that has two fully descended testes to sire a litter.

Dogs Victoria requires that the Stud Dog owner signs a declaration stating that the 'dog is entire, that it has two apparently normal testicles descended into the scrotum' as part of the Litter Registration process. Making a false declaration comes with serious penalties.

Male puppies can be capable of siring a litter quite early, so it is important that you treat all young males as if they were fertile if you have a bitch in season on your premises to avoid the risks of an accidental mating.

There are no seasonal changes in the male dog's sexual activity – if they are presented with a female who is in season, they will mate her.

The penis of the dog has a number of unique features. It has a small bone in it called the 'os penis' that assists with rigidity, and a bulbous region that is responsible for the 'locking together' (called a 'tie') seen during a mating.

Both urine and semen exit via the urethra, so there is only one opening at the end of the penis. When not erect, the penis is usually covered by the prepuce (a sheath of skin).

Important!

Aside from the German Shepherd Dog (minimum 18 months of age), there are currently no rules regarding the minimum age for a Stud Dog.

*However, if your breed has specific health testing or screening requirements, these should be completed **before** the male is made available at stud or allowed to mate a bitch.*

Depending on the testing required, this may impact the age at which a male dog can first be used at stud. For example: x-ray scoring for hip and/or elbow dysplasia cannot be done until the animal reaches 12 months of age.

Testing semen quality

It is possible to have semen collected from a male dog for the purposes of semen evaluation or for freezing for future use.

Although a basic examination of semen quality can be performed by just about any veterinarian, if you are looking to have semen frozen or if your male has failed to get a bitch pregnant, then you should consult a veterinarian who specialises in reproduction.

The quality of semen can vary widely within an individual over time. Sperm production can be influenced by age, nutrition, injury and illness. Sperm is produced in the cells of the teste and then undergoes a period of maturation and storage within the epididymis. If a male dog is not getting used at stud often, or if there are issues during sperm production, there can be abnormalities in sperm development that mean the individual sperm will not be able to move through the female's reproductive tract or fertilise an egg.

Important!

Older males, in particular, can have reduced fertility, so if you are planning on breeding to an older male, or if another breeder has requested to use an older stud dog of yours, it is a good idea to have their semen quality checked prior to the mating.

Normal reproductive anatomy and physiology

Having a male collected is generally fairly simple, although having an in season female is usually required. This 'teaser' female can be of any breed or age as there is no risk of a mating occurring; however, some males can be a little fussy.

Collection of a sample allows a proper assessment to be made ahead of time and also 'flushes out' any older or stale sperm that may have been stored in the epididymis. If any problems with the male's fertility are detected, there may be strategies that can be employed to increase his fertility prior to the breeding, or alternative arrangements can be made without having to go through an unsuccessful mating.

Freezing semen

If you have a young male who is of excellent quality, you may consider having some semen collected and frozen for future use. Frozen semen can last indefinitely and can be shipped anywhere in the world, provided the health testing requirements of the importing country are met at the time of collection.

Semen freezing is only performed by specialist reproduction veterinarians or technicians. It requires special equipment for collecting, treating and freezing the semen. After the male dog is manually collected, the sperm is removed from the semen sample, mixed with a special 'extender', and then frozen as 'pellets' in small vials or in 'straws'.

The vials or straws are placed into storage in liquid nitrogen at minus 196 degrees Celsius and must remain frozen until just before it is ready to be used. The vials or straws are stored on labelled 'canes' within the storage tank, and the level of liquid nitrogen needs to be checked and topped up regularly – this is not something you can do yourself.

Instead, you will pay a storage fee based on the number of straws or vials, and the semen will be stored at the reproductive facility. If it needs to be moved or shipped, a special 'shipper' is used to keep the temperature right during transport.

When it is time for the semen to be used, it is gently thawed. Frozen semen is far more fragile than fresh semen and does not last as long in the female reproductive tract, so the window for success is much smaller. Therefore, a frozen semen mating requires that the bitch is at her most fertile (determined by a series of blood tests), and the semen is deposited high in the reproductive tract (either surgically or via an endoscopic tube placed through the cervix).

Important!

If you are considering having your male dog collected for frozen semen, the best time to do it is when the dog is young and healthy, when their semen quality is at its highest. Generally, this is around 18 months to 3 years of age. In most cases, the collected ejaculate will provide enough semen for multiple matings. However, this will vary based on the size of the male and the quality and volume of the collected sample.



DV Breeder Series

Obtaining a successful mating

Your bitch has completed all of her health clearances, and you have found a stud dog that you think will compliment her strengths and weaknesses. You have waited anxiously for her to come in season, and she has just shown the first signs of approaching oestrus. So your focus has turned to making sure that she has the best chances of becoming pregnant.

Managing a bitch in season

Changes in behaviour

Before your breeding female even showed signs of coming into season, you may have noticed changes in her behaviour or noticed that other dogs (both male and female) were showing an increased interest in her. This is primarily due to differences in her body odour/scent that are the result of the changing hormone levels within her body. Experienced breeders will often be able to tell that their bitch is 'close' simply by watching her behaviour and interactions change when she is with other dogs in the weeks leading up to her season.

When a bitch is getting close to coming into season, it is not uncommon for the group dynamic in a multi pet household to change. The boys will be getting a bit full of themselves, and you may see some rivalry developing in males that were previously fine to run together. The same can be said with girls – tensions may be running high.

Whilst in season, some girls become very clingy with their owners, some appear happy to sleep more, others continue as normal. Every bitch is different, but many breeders say that their girls behave very differently during this time.

It is normal during the first part of the season (pro-oestrus period) for her to react defensively when other animals are sniffing her vulva or 'making advances'. Many girls will simply sit down or move away, but others will behave aggressively, growling, lifting their lip or even snapping at other dogs. This is normal, but you should be managing your bitch in such a way that she is not constantly harassed by other dogs and having to react in this way.

If you do have a multi dog household, you will need to manage your animals in such a way to prevent scuffles or fights when individuals are in season. You may find that you need to move to supervising interactions or separate animals completely if problems develop. You will still need to ensure that all animals receive adequate exercise, social interaction and enrichment each day, but you may need to modify your everyday routine to keep everyone settled.

Preventing unintended matings

The average female is in season for about a week to ten days before she is ready to mate, but this can vary widely, and it assumes that you have correctly identified Day 1. As soon as you see signs of bleeding, you should separate your breeding female from any fertile males, and make sure you manage her in such a way as to minimise the risks of any accidental or unintended matings.

Remember that fences and barricades that are usually secure may not be sufficient to prevent a very determined male dog from reaching a bitch who is ready to mate. There are countless stories of male dogs taking on almost 'superpowers' to get to an in season female – scaling over six foot fences, climbing into pens, digging under fences or breaking through wire. Remember too that you may have neighbours who have entire males who will also be able to smell your bitch on season and may try to gain access to her.

It is very common for males that are able to smell a bitch in season but are restricted access to become quite unsettled. They may become very restless, go off their food (losing body condition) and constantly vocalise (often whimpering and whining). As her most fertile time approaches, they can become very distressed, some frantically looking for ways to access the bitch. Depending on your facilities, you may choose to board your entire male(s) elsewhere when your bitch is in season or send your female to a more secure location.

Daily care of in season females

For the duration of her season, your female will have some amount of discharge from her vulva. Initially, this is bloody, but as the season progresses it may lose its colour, gradually becoming a lighter/clearer 'straw' colour.

As part of your daily health check, you should be checking her vulva and noting the colour and amount of discharge each day. The amount will vary from bitch to bitch – some are very messy; others only have a 'hint of colour'. Some bitches are very 'clean' and will lick and groom themselves to the point that there are almost no signs of discharge at all.

Important!

If at any time during her season, your bitch's discharge changes from bloody or clear to a creamy colour, or if the discharge has an unusual odour, please consult your veterinarian immediately.

Regardless of the amount of discharge, the type and length of coat, and the way you house your bitch, you will want to keep her clean. During her season, you will need to pay particular attention to the area around her vulva, and if necessary, bath or groom the area daily. The discharge as it dries becomes sticky, and knots can quickly form in the hair – this includes the area immediately around her vulva, her tail feathering/coat, right down the backs of her legs to her feet. You will also have to increase the frequency of cleaning her bedding as this will become soiled as well.

Exercise

Although her social interactions may be temporarily limited, it is important that your bitch still gets adequate exercise and mental stimulation. Whilst she is in season it is not appropriate to take your bitch to the dog park or off leash area, and even walking her along the street on a leash can be problematic – you never know when you might encounter loose dogs, and you don't want her leaving a scent trail that leads to your front door.

Instead, you may have to look for ways to allow her to blow off some steam in the safety of a confined area or in your yard. Scenting activities, training sessions and increased enrichment activities may help keep her entertained and provide much needed mental stimulation.

Preparing for the mating

Notify the owner of the stud dog

Now that your bitch is in season, it is time to notify the owner of the stud dog. It is courtesy to give them as much notice as possible, as they may have to rearrange their day to day schedule to accommodate the breeding.

In most cases, the convention is for the female to travel to the male – allowing him to be comfortable in his own surrounds for the mating, and to minimise distractions – but you will need to check with the owner of the stud dog as to their preference.

Depending on where the stud dog is located, you may have to arrange travel and accommodation, or even book air or road transport for your bitch. Most stud dog owners are very accommodating, but like everyone, they have family and work commitments to contend with as well, so giving them plenty of notice will help.

Pre-breeding veterinary health check

Before it is time for your female to be mated, you need to ensure that she is up to date with her veterinary health checks.

If this is her **first ever mating** she will need a '[Clearance to Commence Breeding Certificate](#)' - with the veterinarian signing off that she has reached adequate maturity.

The clearance to commence breeding health check is an excellent time to ask your veterinarian any questions you may have in relation to the mating, pregnancy or whelping – so take a list of questions with you!

Remember:

Dogs Victoria has a nominated 'Minimum Breeding Age' for every breed – please ensure that you have checked that any mating you are planning will comply with this requirement.

Minimum Breeding Ages are published regularly in the Dogs Victoria Gazette, and form part of the Dogs Victoria Regulations (20.1 Code of Practice).

If your female has been bred previously, she will need to have had a veterinary health check **within the last 12 months prior to mating**, and if she will be 8 years or over at the time of the mating, she will need a special clearance within three months prior to mating stating that she is still fit and healthy for breeding.

Important!

Dogs Victoria has prepared templates that you can take to your veterinary visit to help you meet these certification requirements. You can download the templates from the [Breeder resources](#) section of the Dogs Victoria website.

Completed forms should be kept in your bitch's health records.

Making sure the timing is right

The most critical thing in obtaining a successful mating is making sure that you get the timing of the mating right. You need viable sperm present when the matured ova (eggs) reach the stage where fertilisation can occur. If the timing is out, the result is usually a small litter or no litter at all. In fact, reproductive specialists will tell you that incorrectly identifying the time to mate is the leading cause of 'infertility' in females.

Before the mysteries of the canine reproductive cycle were unravelled, breeders would simply watch their bitch's behaviour to the stud dog, and once she was receptive, they would attempt a mating. The standard procedure was to put the dog in with the bitch on Day 10 and again a day or two later if she was still receptive. Most breeders at this time would have been using their own stud dog or one that was local, so access to the male was generally not a problem.

This strategy was mostly successful for your 'average' bitch. If the timing was slightly out, the fact that fresh semen could survive in the female reproductive tract for a number of days usually made up for the difference, and most bitches would fall pregnant.

DV Breeder Series

Obtaining a successful mating

Of course, with modern technology, we now realise that the time to ovulation in bitches varies widely. The receptive behaviours observed – such as flagging the tail and ‘standing’ - may not actually correspond with ovulation and the time of maximum fertility in some females. Scientists have found that bitches who were thought to be infertile, may actually be ovulating very early or very late in their cycle and that ovulation can occur with or without accompanying physical or behavioural signs.

Document every season

One of the best strategies for a breeder is to document every season thoroughly. It is likely that your bitch will cycle in a similar way every time she comes in, and the time interval between seasons is usually very similar. Recording the details of each season, regardless of whether the bitch is to be mated or not, can provide a baseline picture of what is ‘normal’ for her.

Records for each season should include:

- » Start Date – the first day that swelling and/or discharge was seen
- » Daily observations of discharge colour and amount
- » Observations of behaviour changes and receptiveness
- » Results of any tests used to determine the timing of ovulation
- » Dates and details of any matings
- » End Date

Behavioural and physical indicators

Generally speaking, the ‘normal’ bitch will have a period in her cycle where she becomes receptive to the male. She will transition from avoiding or actively repelling advances by the male, to ‘flirting’ and almost encouraging him. A bitch in ‘full season’ will stand solidly, and will ‘flag her tail’ (moving the tail upwards and to the side whilst tilting her pelvis).

The breeder may also note that her vulva, which is already quite swollen, becomes softer and the discharge changes from bloody to blood tinged or straw coloured around this time. However, these changes are not reliable indicators of ovulation or readiness to be mated.

Vaginal smear

Before the advent of progesterone testing, many breeders relied on their veterinarian monitoring changes to the cells lining the reproductive tract over the course of the season. A sample of cells was collected from the vagina using a cotton bud. The cells were spread onto a glass slide, stained with a special dye, and then observed under a microscope.

Changes to the shape, size and composition of the cells (which is under the influence of the hormone *oestrogen*) were monitored over time and used to time the mating. This method relied on the ability and skill of the person looking at the cells under the microscope.

Blood progesterone test

Nowadays, most veterinarians rely on monitoring the levels of the hormone *progesterone* to predict the timing of ovulation accurately. Progesterone testing involves collecting samples of blood from the bitch, and monitoring the rise in progesterone that occurs around the time of ovulation.

Some clinics have the ability to process the sample ‘in house’, so results can take as little as an hour, but most rely on an external pathology service (similar to human doctors) where samples are transported to a central laboratory for testing.

Progesterone levels in the bitch remain at baseline until around 48 hours prior to ovulation. They then start to rise quite sharply. After ovulation, they continue to rise and remain high throughout the pregnancy. Progesterone levels can also be used to determine the timing of whelping as the level will drop suddenly about 24 hours prior to the birth.

The units used for recording progesterone levels vary around the world, which can make things a little confusing. In Australia, they are generally expressed as nmol/L (nano-moles per litre).

Ovulation occurs when the progesterone level reaches 15 to 25 nmol/L, and mating should be timed to occur 24 to 48 hours after this level has been reached. Your veterinarian may need to take several samples spread over a number of days to determine the timing of ovulation.

Interpreting Progesterone Results

<i>Baseline</i>	<i>0 – 2 nmol/L</i>
<i>Pre-Ovulatory rise</i>	<i>2 – 8 nmol/L</i>
<i>Ovulation Imminent</i>	<i>10 – 15 nmol/L</i>
<i>Ovulation</i>	<i>15 – 25 nmol/L</i>
<i>24 hours after Ovulation</i>	<i>> 25 nmol/L</i>

Whelping occurs within 24 hours of Progesterone dropping below 6 nmol/L

Source: Gribbles Veterinary Pathology

DV Breeder Series

Obtaining a successful mating

Natural mating

When it comes time for the mating to occur, the bitch and dog should be introduced to each other in a secure area away from other animals. The area used for matings should be out of the weather, well lit, and should have non slip flooring/footings. You are looking for a place that minimises distractions, and that will be comfortable for both you and the dogs.

All matings need to be supervised – both to check that the animals are safe at all times, and to ensure a successful mating has occurred. There may be time where a little assistance is required to achieve a successful outcome, so having an experienced breeder or mentor present is a good idea.

When they are first introduced, the dog will usually be very interested in, and highly aroused by the smell of the bitch. There is typically a period of sniffing, licking, and play type behaviour before the male will attempt to mount the bitch. If she is receptive, she will stand still, often tilting her pelvis and holding her tail up and to the side (called 'flagging'). Depending on the experience level of the dog, and the behaviour of the bitch, he may repeat this sniffing, play and mounting several times, with or without some thrusting.

Eventually, he will mount the bitch, and the thrusting will be successful in getting his penis to enter the vulva. At this point, you will see him begin thrusting harder and faster, pushing his penis further into the vulva. Next, the bulb of his penis (located at the base of the shaft) will swell inside the bitch. As the bulb swells, it acts to hold the dog's penis inside the bitch – called a 'tie' – as well as stimulating contractions in the bitch that help move the sperm in the right direction.

During the 'tie', the dog will usually dismount to one side and move his hind leg over, so the dog and bitch end up tail to tail. A normal tie can last anywhere up to an hour, and you will need to supervise to ensure that the bitch does not move around too much, potentially damaging the dog's penis. Eventually, the bulb will contract, and the tie will end naturally. Do not try to pull the two animals apart as you risk causing damage to both of them.

Natural matings are physically and mentally tiring, especially for the stud dog. It is important that both animals are allowed to rest after the mating is complete. If left together, the male dog is unlikely to settle, so they need to be separated and allowed some 'quiet time' well away from each other where they can rest and sleep.

How many matings will I need?

If the timing is spot on and both animals are fertile, a pregnancy should result from a single mating. More often than not, though, the exact timing of ovulation may not be known, so most breeders will arrange to do more than one natural mating to maximise the chances of conception.

The goal is to have viable sperm present at the top of the uterus just as the mature eggs arrive ready to be fertilised. Normal healthy sperm can last for 3 to 4 days inside the warmth of the female reproductive tract, so a repeat mating is usually scheduled for 24 to 48 hours after the first successful tie.

Important!

You should record the date of every mating that occurs – especially if you do more than one mating. This allows you to correctly calculate your bitch's expected whelp date and will enable you to properly prepare for your litter.

Will I need to assist?

In most cases, especially with experienced stud dogs, there will be little need to get involved – in fact, it is best that you leave the dog to do his thing and just observe the interaction to make sure everything goes smoothly.

However, if the stud dog is young or inexperienced, he may need a little guidance or encouragement to get the job done, especially if the bitch is a bit fidgety or vocal.

Important!

It is crucial that early sexual experiences are very positive, and the dog is not scolded or physically punished (such as a leash correction) for showing interest in a female that is in season.

Unpleasant experiences may potentially lead to a dog who will be reluctant to mate a bitch in the future, so remain positive and encouraging, and avoid any rough handling, yelling or leash corrections during a mating.

Many breeders choose to keep their bitch on leash, just to help keep her still, and to minimise the amount of play and racing around that may occur (especially if the mating is taking place in hot weather). It also means that there is some level of control once the animals are tied, preventing the bitch from dragging the dog around the yard. Just make sure that no one gets tangled in the lead.

DV Breeder Series

Obtaining a successful mating

Trouble shooting

There may be times where having an experienced breeder or your mentor present may make all the difference. They have many strategies that may assist in getting a successful mating, and they know when to step in, and when to stand back and leave the pair alone.

If the bitch is standing solidly and flagging, and the dog is not having any success despite mounting a number of times, it may be possible to gently assist and help guide his penis towards the vulva as he thrusts. Not all males will tolerate manual assistance, but if it is done quietly and gently, it may be enough to get things started.

Occasionally the problem is that there is enough of a height difference between the dog and bitch that it makes it difficult for the dog to thrust at the right angle. The solution may be to find some ground with a gentle slope or a small step to help even things up.

Some bitches may not be very receptive to the advances of the male. If this is the case, the first thing to confirm is that she is truly ready to mate. Bitches can be very aggressive (snapping and snarling at the male) if they are not ready, and 24 hours later be flirty and extremely receptive, so correct timing is vital. A progesterone test will confirm where she is in her season.

If you have already confirmed that the bitch is right in the window to be mated, then it may be that she is insecure due to inexperience, has a preference for a different male, or the mounting and mating is causing pain. Some males can be very rough or over enthusiastic – in this case, selecting a calmer, confident and experienced stud dog next time may be the answer.

If a mating cannot be achieved, there may be a physical reason such as a stricture or narrowing of the vulva that is preventing a successful mating. An experienced breeder or your mentor should be able to tell when something is not right and whether you may need to seek veterinary advice.

When to seek help from your veterinarian

If you are satisfied that the bitch is genuinely ready to mate, but you cannot manage a successful tie, you may need to schedule a visit to your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian can confirm that your bitch is ready to be mated, and may be able to assist with the mating. They will also be able to examine both the dog and the bitch to ensure there are no physical problems that may be preventing a mating, and give advice on how any detected issues may be resolved.

If your regular veterinarian does not have a lot of experience, they may refer you to a veterinarian that specialises in reproduction.



Assisted and artificial breeding techniques

Around the world, huge advances have been made in the field of canine reproduction. There are now a number of assisted and artificial breeding options available to breeders, and veterinary specialists in the field of reproduction that can assist breeders in resolving fertility issues and obtaining successful matings.

Opinions on the ethical use of artificial breeding technologies vary widely. In some countries, there are rules in relation to the use of artificial or assisted breeding techniques, and certain procedures and technologies are banned in some countries. This is in an attempt to ensure that the breeding population remains healthy and that we continue to actively select for animals that can both mate and whelp a litter naturally.

Despite the differing opinions, there are many advantages of this technology, especially in a country such as Australia. Our strict quarantine laws and our relatively small dog population has traditionally made it very challenging for breeders to maintain genetic diversity within their breeding stock.

The importation of stud dogs has always been very costly, with compulsory quarantine periods and complex certification requirements. Generally, only highly dedicated breeders have undertaken the drawn out process of bringing new blood into the country.

Modern advances have opened up the possibility of using genetic material that has been collected and stored in such a way that the male does not have to be present for a mating to occur. Canine breeding technologies allow breeders to access males that would otherwise not be available for consideration. This provides opportunities to expand the gene pool, address existing or emerging health problems and continue to improve the soundness of their breed.

Artificial insemination using fresh semen

Artificial insemination using fresh semen is probably the most commonly used assisted breeding technology. Most veterinarians (and many experienced breeders) are able to successfully collect semen from a stud dog and, using a special pipette, transfer the semen from the collection vessel through the vulva, depositing it directly into the bitch's vagina.

This method can be used where there are physical limitations that prevent a breeding – maybe the stud dog is older and finds natural matings physically challenging, or perhaps he has sustained an injury that prevents or makes it difficult for him to mount a bitch. This method can also be used where there are issues with the bitch that make a natural mating difficult to achieve, such as a vulval stricture, or vaginal hyperplasia.

Although this method can be used to 'get around' many physical issues, it is important to consider if the reason for the breeding difficulty may have a hereditary component. Breeding from these animals may lead to a breeder producing a whole line of pups that have the same issue, rather than selecting away from the problem.

A stud dog that cannot perform a natural mating due to extremes of size or weight, poor conformation or due to respiratory restrictions should not be bred from on health grounds. Bitches with serious reproductive abnormalities or temperament issues that prevent them from breeding naturally should also be removed from your breeding program.

Artificial insemination using frozen or chilled semen

Normally, canine semen can only survive outside the body for a very short time, meaning a mating needs to take place in 'real time' for a successful outcome. Luckily, there have been methods developed that allow semen to remain viable for a longer time, allowing it to be shipped across the country, or across the world.

Although 'chilled semen' is used extensively in the United States, its use in Australia is less common. Chilled semen has a life span of approximately 2 to 4 days, allowing the male to be collected, and then the semen shipped via courier to the bitch for insemination. The timing of the collection and shipping is critical to its success, so any delays in transport or processing will render the sample worthless.

Instead, most breeders looking to ship semen long distances chose to use frozen semen. The semen is collected from the stud dog and then spun in a centrifuge to help separate it into its various components. The sperm rich fraction is then mixed with a special 'extender' solution that helps to nourish and protect the sperm whilst frozen.

The sample is separated into doses called 'breeding units' and rapidly chilled and then frozen. It is then stored (either as pellets or straws) in a canister containing liquid nitrogen. When the time is right, the semen is then gently thawed and inseminated into the bitch.

Frozen semen can be stored indefinitely as long as it remains at the correct temperature. This means that a male can sire a litter long after he has died. Although the technology is still relatively new, there are litters that have been born from 30 and 40 year old semen.

Timing a frozen semen mating

Frozen semen is considered far more 'fragile' than fresh semen. After all, it has been collected, centrifuged, mixed with extender, frozen and then thawed before the time of insemination. Frozen semen also has a much shorter lifespan inside the bitch than fresh semen. For these reasons, the timing of a frozen semen insemination is far more critical than a natural mating.

If you are planning on using this type of technology, you will need to discuss the process with your reproductive veterinarian (this is not a service that regular veterinarians offer) well ahead of time. The usual procedure is to notify them as soon as your bitch comes into season.

Assisted and artificial breeding techniques

They will want to plot a 'progesterone curve', so you will need to be prepared for several blood tests to be taken as your bitch progresses through her season. Initially, this may be every 2 to 3 days but will become daily as she approaches ovulation.

Because the timing is so critical, most veterinarians will be very specific as to when the mating needs to occur – timing it not just to the day, but even the time of day.

Insemination with frozen semen

Because it is so fragile, frozen semen is placed directly into the uterus (rather than deposited in the vagina). This means it does not have to travel the full length of the reproductive tract to reach the egg, conserving its energy stores. With the transit time reduced, frozen semen insemination takes place often a day or two after a natural mating, or fresh semen AI would be scheduled.

Frozen semen can be inseminated in several ways:

» **Surgical insemination**

When inseminated surgically, the uterus is accessed through an incision in the abdomen. The uterus is gently lifted, and the semen is injected through a catheter into the top of the uterine horn on each side. This method allows the veterinarian to examine the uterus visually but requires a full anaesthetic, so it is not without risks.

» **Trans-cervical insemination (TCI)**

This method involves using a 'scope' to navigate a catheter through the cervix into the uterus. The scope is inserted into the bitch's vagina with her awake and standing. An experienced operator can pass the catheter quite quickly, but the opening to the cervix can be tricky to access. This method does not require an anaesthetic but relies on the bitch remaining still during the procedure.

Because of the need for an anaesthetic, many veterinarians feel surgical insemination is an unacceptable risk for the bitch, and will refuse to use this method. Surgical insemination is also banned in many European countries, and progeny from this type of insemination cannot be registered.

In Australia, both methods are currently used, although the Australian Veterinary Association has recently published a policy that suggests surgical insemination should no longer be performed. The choice of method used will be based on your reproductive veterinarian's preferences and experiences. If you have a strong preference for one method over the other, you may need to choose to use a particular practice or veterinarian that regularly uses that method.

Preparing for a frozen semen mating

There are a number of things that you will need to do well ahead of time to make sure that everything is in place before your bitch comes into season:

1. Speak to the veterinarian that you plan to use – they will want to make sure that you understand what is involved, and walk you through the timeline. You will need to have several progesterone tests done. If you live a long way from their clinic, you may be able to have the early samples collected by your regular veterinarian.
2. Make sure that the semen you plan to use is moved to the clinic performing the insemination well ahead of time. Semen is moved in smaller vessels called 'shippers'. These need to be charged with liquid nitrogen so the semen remains at the correct temperature during transit. Although shipping is relatively simple, it can take a few days to organise, so don't leave it to the last minute!
3. Make sure that the semen has been registered, and that you have a stud agreement in place with the owner of the semen. When semen is collected and frozen, it is not automatically registered. The same applies to imported semen; it needs to be [registered on the Dogs Australia database](#). You will need to make sure that the appropriate paperwork has been lodged with Dogs Victoria (or another ANKC state controlling body) and the semen that you plan to use is registered. That way, there will be no delays in registering your litter.
4. If the intended Sire has not previously had an Australian DNA Profile recorded, you may need to have DNA extracted from the semen to meet your parentage verification requirements, make sure you are familiar with the options and processes involved.
5. Finally, make sure that the inseminating veterinarian completes the required paperwork at the time of the insemination. This will need to accompany your litter registration paperwork when it comes time to register your puppies.



Assisted and artificial breeding techniques

Importing frozen semen

If you plan to access a sire from another country, you may need to go down the path of importing semen. Although this can be a very costly and time consuming process, it does offer you the opportunity to select the very best sire for your bitch, regardless of where he lives.

You will have to make sure that the semen complies with the Australian Import requirements and that it is coming from an approved country. You can access a full list of requirements by visiting the [Australian Department of Agriculture website](#).

The import requirements may mean that the owner of the stud dog will have to arrange for their stud dog to undergo a number of tests as well as the actual collection of the semen. There are several Australian companies that specialise in importing and clearing semen shipments through customs who can assist with the process if you need.

You may get lucky and find the owner already has semen stored that complies with all of the requirements and can be released for shipping immediately. If not, the various tests and veterinary health checks will need to take place, both before and after the actual collection. This can be a drawn out process, so you need to plan well ahead.

Important!

*It is important to note that the requirements for pre and post collection testing changed a number of years ago and it may be that semen collected prior to the rule changes may **not be eligible** for import. There are strict rules to prevent any exotic diseases from entering Australia, so any semen shipments will be checked to ensure they comply.*

Stud agreements

You should always have a written stud agreement with the owner of the male you intend to use, regardless of how the conception will take place.

Stud agreements traditionally outline the cost of the stud fee, when it needs to be paid, and what happens if the bitch does not fall pregnant.

Important!

Regardless of whether you plan to do a natural mating, use fresh or frozen semen, you also need to do your 'due diligence' to ensure that the male you plan to use is registered, is eligible for breeding, and that his owners meet the required membership of their kennel club or controlling body.

If you are using frozen semen, there will still be a stud fee, but there also needs to be a written agreement documenting who is responsible for any costs relating to collection, storage, pre and post collection testing, registration or shipping of the semen.

Where more than one breeding unit is released to the owner of the female, there needs to be agreement on what happens to any unused semen, whether it can be used in future, any additional stud fees that need to be paid, and whether it can be sold.

If you are contemplating using artificial insemination techniques, speak to other breeders or your mentors to learn more about their experiences. They will also be able to give you recommendations for reproduction veterinarians nearby.



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your pregnant bitch

All of your planning has come together, you have anxiously waited for your bitch to come into season and she has been mated to the stud dog that you carefully selected for her. Hopefully, she will be pregnant ('in whelp') and it won't be long until you are welcoming your litter into the world.

Although you will have done everything to make sure that she was healthy and in tip top condition prior to the mating, now is the time to make sure that she receives extra care and attention so that her pregnancy is uneventful, and you are both ready for the birth.

How will I know if she is pregnant?

One of the first things you will want to know is whether the mating has been successful. The canine reproductive cycle is unusual in that the hormonal changes seen in the two months after a season/oestrus are basically the same whether the bitch is pregnant or not – meaning that she may act and look like she is pregnant even if she has not been mated.

Pseudo (or 'phantom') pregnancy is quite common and can be quite deceiving, even to experienced breeders. Females with a pseudopregnancy can put on weight, show teat development and even produce milk. They may show all of the behaviour changes associated with pregnancy, may dig a nest, and even snuggle up with objects such as toys. For this reason, it is impossible to confirm a pregnancy simply by observing behavioural or physical changes (such as swollen nipples or weight gain).

Her season will end

Due to the timing of the most fertile period being right at the end of the oestrus period, you will probably notice that your female 'goes off season' in the days after the mating. She will become less attractive to male dogs, her vulva will begin to return to normal size, and any discharge (which is usually straw coloured by the end of her season) will begin to dry up. She is entering the part of her reproductive cycle called 'dioestrus'.

It is important that you wait until she is completely off season before allowing her to run with any other male dogs. If she has access to other males, there is always the chance that a second mating could occur (even if she has not shown any interest in the other dog(s) previously). After taking the time to carefully plan a breeding, you do not want to leave anything to chance. If you are not sure, your veterinarian can run a progesterone test to check that her fertile period has passed.

During this time, the fertilised egg (now called an embryo) will divide a number of times and migrate through the reproductive tract before implanting itself in the lining of the uterus. This implantation occurs approximately 17 days after fertilisation.

Important!

If your bitch continues to have a discharge or continues to look like she is 'in season' for more than a few days after her last mating, she should be examined by a veterinarian.

It may simply be that the timing of the mating was not right (allowing you to arrange another mating), or there may be issues that may impact her likelihood of falling pregnant and carrying a litter to term.

Your veterinarian will be able to advise you of the best course of action or may refer you to a veterinarian that specialises in reproduction to ensure the best possible outcome.

Palpation

At around three weeks, it is possible for an experienced person to palpate ('feel') for a pregnancy. The implanted embryos at this stage are small and round and they are separated from each other within the uterus. They can be felt through the stomach wall using the right technique, and an experienced operator can usually give a rough idea of the number of embryos present.

Depending on the size and shape of your bitch, there will be areas of the abdomen that are difficult to access with this technique, and your bitch will need to be relaxed to allow the palpation to occur.

Palpation is only useful for pregnancy diagnosis during a short window of time. Usually, by about four weeks, the individual embryos have grown to a size where they begin to converge, and it is no longer possible to feel individual 'puppies'.

Ultrasound

Most veterinary practices these days have access to an ultrasound machine, and this can be used to both detect and monitor a pregnancy. Ultrasound examination is best performed from four weeks and can be used right up to the time of whelping.

Ultrasound has the advantage of not only being able to see the embryos but also to measure their size accurately and visualise the puppy heartbeats. As the ultrasound provides a two dimensional 'slice' of a three dimensional object, the operator needs some experience to ensure that all areas of the uterus are examined. Where there are quite a few pups, the litter count determined by ultrasound is likely to be lower than the actual number.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your pregnant bitch



Blood test

Where your veterinarian does not have access to an ultrasound machine, it is possible to take a blood test to determine the level of a hormone called 'Relaxin'. This hormone is secreted by the pregnant bitch from about day 20 of gestation, and the test is usually performed from day 25. This is great for early pregnancy diagnosis, but only gives a 'yes-no' answer and does not indicate the size of any potential litter.

X-Ray

An X-Ray cannot be used for early pregnancy diagnosis, but it comes into its own closer to the whelping date. Once the skeletons of the puppies start to calcify (moving from cartilage to bone), X-ray can be used to accurately count and see the position of the puppies.

Generally, X-ray is only used in the last week or so of the pregnancy to give an accurate count of pups. It can also be used during or after the birth to ensure all puppies have been whelped, especially if the bitch experiences difficulties during the whelping process.

Important!

If early pregnancy detection suggests that your bitch may only have one or two puppies she may be at increased risk of having difficulties during the birth – your veterinarian will be able to explain the risks to you.

Your veterinarian may suggest a pre whelping health check for your bitch or an X-ray during the final week of pregnancy, just to confirm numbers.

Regardless of the anticipated litter size, make sure that you have discussed with your veterinarian the procedure you should follow if things are not going to plan. You should also determine their availability around the time of the expected birth. If they do not offer an out of hours service, ask them to recommend one nearby.

Caring for your bitch during pregnancy

Nutrition

You will have worked on making sure your bitch was in perfect body condition before her mating, so for the first few weeks of her pregnancy, nothing should need to change. At this early stage, the nutritional demands of pregnancy are very low.

For the first few weeks, you should continue to feed her a complete and balanced diet at the same amount and frequency as before she was mated. You want to avoid over feeding her at this stage as putting on too much weight may predispose her to problems when it comes time to whelp her puppies.

As her pregnancy progresses past the first few weeks, you may find that her appetite suddenly increases – some girls become absolutely ravenous and obsessed with food! If your bitch is housed with others, it is advisable to keep a close eye on interactions where food is involved as some girls can become increasingly possessive of food at this time.

As she moves into the latter stages of pregnancy, your bitch's nutritional needs will increase as the puppies hit their period of maximum development. Because she needs to eat more, but space in her abdomen is at a premium due to the growing pups, feeding should move to two or three smaller meals each day. Of course, she should have access to clean, fresh water at all times.

If you feed a dry kibble based diet, you may want to begin to transition her to a 'puppy formula' dry food in the latter stages of the pregnancy. Puppy dry formulas have slightly higher levels of calcium and protein and are generally more energy 'dense' which may help her meet her calorie requirement with a lower volume of food, both at the end of her pregnancy and during the high demands of lactation.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your pregnant bitch

If you have any questions about the correct amount or type of food to feed your pregnant bitch, please consult your veterinarian for advice.

You should also consult your veterinarian immediately if your pregnant bitch seems off her food, refuses to eat, or has signs of a tummy upset (such as vomiting or diarrhoea) during her pregnancy.

Supplementing the diet

It is important that you feed your pregnant bitch a diet that is 'nutritionally complete' (all vital nutrients, vitamins and minerals present) and 'balanced' (all nutrients in the correct ratio to each other).

If her diet is lacking in vital nutrients, she will be forced to deplete her own body stores to grow her puppies. This can lead to serious deficiencies developing over time. Deficiencies of vital nutrients can lead to problems during pregnancy, birth and beyond.

Overdoing it with supplements can be just as dangerous to the mother and her growing pups. In particular, over supplementation with calcium during the pregnancy can lead to serious problems once the litter has whelped and the mother begins to produce milk.

If you are feeding a commercial pet food diet, the manufacturer will have calculated the nutrient breakdown of the food for you - check that the label states 'nutritionally complete and balanced'. In most cases, there should be no need to supplement these types of diet.

If you are feeding a home cooked or raw diet, then you need to make sure that you formulate it to ensure it is complete and balanced.

You should speak to your veterinarian if you are considering supplementing your bitch's diet or if your bitch eats a home cooked or raw diet regularly. They will be able to tell you if supplements are necessary, and when it would be appropriate and safe to give them.

Exercise, socialisation and enrichment

Just because your bitch is pregnant, does not mean she should miss out on any of her daily routine. Exercise is important to keep her fit and strong and mental stimulation and social interaction are just as important as before she was mated.

Your pregnant bitch should have exercise, social interaction and enrichment activities every day. You may need to modify the amount and type of exercise as her pregnancy progresses, but exercise helps keep her fit, and ensures all of the muscles that assist with the pregnancy and birth remain strong.

Avoid overly strenuous exercise sessions or exercise in extremes of weather. You do not want your bitch's internal body temperature forced outside of the normal range as this can impact the growing pups.

Although most girls are fine to run, play or exercise with other dogs during their pregnancy (and many love the social interaction), you may need to modify this as she gets to the more advanced stages of her pregnancy. Keep a close eye on all interactions, and step in or change the routine if required.

In the last few weeks of pregnancy, it may be that social interactions with other dogs are restricted to calm, compatible house or kennel mates and that exercise sessions are separate from other dogs. If you have a multi dog household, remember that the group dynamic may change, both when your girl is in season and throughout her pregnancy. Make sure that you keep a close eye on everyone's behaviour, and modify your management as required. This is especially important if your regular enrichment activities include food and/or toys as these resources may have increased value at this time.

Routine health care during pregnancy

Pregnancy puts additional stresses on the body, and it is important that you do everything you can to minimise the risks of disease and illness at this time as pregnant animals are at an increased risk if exposed to disease.

Preventative treatments

Before she was mated, you will have ensured that your bitch was up to date with all of her preventative health care treatments - vaccination, worming and other parasite protection. This is particularly important as it reduces transmission of parasites to the pups, and will ensure that they receive an adequate level of immunity through the important first milk (called 'colostrum').

Worming and parasite protection needs to continue throughout the pregnancy, and whilst she raises her litter, but you must make sure that any products that you use are safe to be given during pregnancy and lactation. Talk to your veterinarian if you are not sure.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your pregnant bitch

Daily health checks

All dogs in your care will already be undergoing a daily health check – making sure that they are eating and drinking normally, that there are no signs of injury or illness. Now that your bitch is pregnant, you want to be super observant as you do not want her to be unwell at any time during the pregnancy.

Every day you need to be checking her vulva closely for any signs of discharge, and both looking at and feeling each of her teats. If you have any concerns, you should immediately consult with your veterinarian. Early intervention, diagnosis and treatment is vital during pregnancy.

If your bitch does become unwell, make sure that you tell your veterinarian that she is pregnant. There are some otherwise very safe medications that are not suitable for pregnant animals, and treatments that may cause the bitch to abort her pups, so it is important that medications are chosen carefully.

Important!

Never give your pregnant bitch any medications, supplements or other treatments without checking carefully that they are safe to give to pregnant or lactating animals. Read the labels carefully, and if you are not sure, consult your veterinarian for advice.

Grooming

During the pregnancy, it is important that you continue your bitch's regular grooming and coat care. She can be bathed, but make sure that you dry her completely, and don't let her get cold/chilled. Towards the end of the pregnancy, you may find she is less comfortable sitting or standing for long periods, so grooming may need to be broken down into shorter sessions.

If you have a breed with a lot of coat or long hair, you may want to trim her hair short as it draws closer to the birth to make it more manageable. Some breeders will clipper or shave around the teats or around the vulva/under the tail to make it easier to monitor the area and make it easier to keep her clean.

Cleanliness and hygiene

Because pregnancy places added stresses on the body, now is the time to take your cleanliness and hygiene to the next level. You will already be picking up droppings daily, and cleaning and disinfecting bedding, toys and food items regularly. Now is the time to consider increasing the frequency of this so that everything is squeaky clean throughout the pregnancy.

Make sure any disinfectants you use are safe, and make sure items such as food and water dishes are well rinsed before use.

Minimising stress

Throughout the pregnancy, you want to minimise stress as this can impact the developing puppies – so making sure that your pregnant bitch is relaxed and comfortable should be a priority. Although her routine will be basically the same, you may need to pay a little more attention to ensure she is happy and calm.

If there are extremes of weather during her pregnancy, pay particular attention to keeping her warm or cooling her down. Try to keep your routine as normal as possible, and monitor multi pet household dynamics to make sure that her pregnancy is as uneventful as possible.

During pregnancy, you may notice some behaviour changes in your bitch – some become clingier and suddenly do not want to be left alone, others may become more assertive with their housemates. Some want to retreat and spend more time alone, others spend more time resting but remain very social.

No two bitches are the same. Some will be fussy with their food, others will appear always hungry – pregnancy affects different animals in different ways.

If your bitch is an 'only dog' managing her should be fairly easy. If you have a multi pet household, you will need to monitor interactions between animals throughout the pregnancy to minimise stress and potential scuffles. It may be that certain individuals who were fine together normally, now need to be separated or supervised. The way food, treats, toys and enrichment items are delivered or used may need to be tweaked. The aim is to prevent problems occurring, and to manage your animals in a way that keeps everyone safe.



DV Breeder Series

Preparing the whelping area

The due date for your litter is fast approaching, so you want to make sure that you are set up and ready to go. You also want to make sure that your bitch is settled and comfortable in the whelping area before it comes time to have her babies.

Choosing a suitable whelping area

The ideal whelping area is somewhere quiet, draft free, and well lit. Your bitch will need to feel safe and secure, so you will need to choose somewhere well away from other dogs and busy household 'traffic'.

For many breeders, the whelping area will be set up inside the house where supervision during those first few days or weeks is easy. Depending on your home's layout, possible options may include the laundry or a spare bathroom as these are generally areas that are easier to keep clean. Other breeders may choose to set up their whelping area in their garage. It really does not matter as long as it is easy to access, easy to clean, has adequate ventilation, and is separate from other dogs.

You will need to set up your whelping area well ahead of time so that your bitch has a week or so to get used to her new sleeping quarters, and you have time to ensure everything is ready and working.

Make sure that the area you choose allows for easy supervision of the bitch and pups. You will probably spend many hours supervising the birth, checking on pups, assisting with feeding, and handling the puppies – so you want to be comfortable and have room to sit and watch, get in and clean, and maybe even sleep nearby for those first few nights.

If left to their own devices, bitches will choose their own whelping area - somewhere dark and quiet. Often this will be behind a shed, under a bed, in the bottom of a cupboard or under the house – so make sure that you help her transition to her whelping area well ahead of time.

You may have to restrict her access to certain areas (if needed) during those last few weeks to prevent her getting into a place where you will struggle to get her out should she decide to whelp early.

You also want to make sure that your whelping area is secure, so she cannot move her pups after they are born. A secure whelping area also prevents other dogs or unsupervised children from gaining access to the pups or stressing the mother.

The whelping box

During the birth and for the first few weeks, your bitch will spend most of her day in with her pups – cleaning them, feeding them, and sleeping.

Puppies cannot regulate their own body temperature at this age, so they need to be protected from the cold. The idea of a 'whelping box' is to provide an area that helps to contain the pups, preventing them from straying too far from their littermates and their mother.

The whelping box needs to be large enough for the mother to lie down, turn around, and stretch out comfortably so she can feed her pups. It needs walls high enough to prevent puppies escaping, but low enough that the mother can get in and out easily.

The whelping box needs to keep the mother and pups up off the cold ground, but not so high that there is a risk of puppies falling out and getting hurt. Outside of the whelping box, there needs to be a secure area where the bitch can rest comfortably away from the pups and where her food and water bowls can be safely placed.



There are a variety of commercially available whelping boxes available – made from fibreglass, laminate or other easily cleaned materials. Many have 'roll bars' (sometimes called 'crush rails' or 'pig rails') mounted on the walls to prevent the bitch from accidentally crushing a pup as she lies down. Some have inbuilt heating functions you can use to keep the puppies warm. Of course any easily cleaned, appropriately sized and shaped 'box' (it does not have to be square) will work. It must be made of a material that can be disinfected easily, and the walls must be solid – so soft pet beds or cardboard boxes are not suitable.

Remember:

If you are new to breeding dogs, ask to see what other breeders use. You may even be able to borrow a whelping box from another breeder or your mentor(s).

Your whelping box needs to accommodate the mother and the growing pups through to around four weeks of age, so you need to factor in the size of your breed, and the likely litter size when choosing one.

DV Breeder Series

Preparing the whelping area

Temperature

Your whelping area will need to be able to be maintained within 10 to 32 degrees Celsius at all times, and it needs to have adequate ventilation. Consider the time of year that you will be whelping your litter and think about how you will deal with any extremes of weather that may occur.

Regardless of the time of year, you will need a heat source for your puppies – this may be a heat lamp, an electric heat pad, hot water bottles or heated whelping box.

For the first three weeks of life, puppies cannot regulate their own temperature, so they are particularly susceptible to the cold. In the first few days of life, puppies require a higher temperature (up around 32 degrees Celsius), but this gradually decreases to around 25 degrees by the fourth week.

Often the temperature that best suits the pups will be too hot for the mother, and if she is hot, she will be restless. Restless mothers are at a higher risk of stepping on or lying on their pups because they move around more, get up and down trying to get comfortable or keep getting in and out of the whelping box.

Often the best solution is to provide a variable temperature gradient across the whelping box. This can be easily achieved by placing a heat lamp at a safe height over one corner of the whelping box. This gives both the mother and pups the option of moving towards or away from the heat as required. It is not uncommon to find the pups piled up in a group sleeping happily under the lamp, with mum asleep in the cooler area of the whelping box.

If you decide to use heating pads or hot water bottles, you will need to check them regularly – both to ensure they are at the right temperature, and to make sure they are still covered properly as there is the risk of burns if skin comes into direct contact with the hot surface.

Ventilation

Your whelping area needs to have adequate ventilation – allowing good airflow to prevent odours. This has to be at a level that provides fresh air, without causing drafts that may chill the pups.

Have a look at your whelping area. Are there windows you can open to allow air movement? An exhaust fan that can be used to remove smells? Or do you need to address any possible sources of cold drafts? Think ahead about how you will provide proper ventilation to your whelping area.

Bedding

Your whelping box needs to contain soft absorbent bedding that can be easily disposed of or cleaned and disinfected.

You can expect a lot of mess during the birth, so most breeders choose to replace the bedding with newspaper as the litter is whelped. The bitch can dig it up, tear it up and once soiled it can be removed and disposed of easily. Now might be a good time to start stocking up on newspapers in preparation for the whelping!

You are going to need to clean the whelping box and bedding several times a day – especially if you have a larger litter, or if your bitch is not keen to eat the puppy's droppings. Many breeders use a base of newspaper covered with a layer of 'dry bed' (a soft, easily cleaned bedding used in veterinary hospitals) for the whelping box. The newspaper can be replaced at each clean, and the dry bed pieces can be rotated – allowing the used ones to be washed and dried and a clean piece to be placed in the box.

Speak to other breeders or your mentor(s) and ask what they use and why. They should also be able to help you source appropriate bedding. Remember you need to have enough bedding to be able to cope with 2 to 3 bedding changes each day.

Whatever bedding you choose, it should be soft and comfortable for the bitch to lie on, and easy to wash and dry. Although deep, thick bedding may seem even more comfortable, you need to be careful that puppies do not become trapped or squashed if they get themselves under layers of bedding.

Finally, you need to ensure that the bedding provides some traction for the puppies to move about on. Slippery surfaces or surfaces where toenails can get caught will prevent puppies from being able to get to the teats to feed or to move to the warmth when they are cold.

Lighting

Your whelping area needs to have good lighting so that you can see what is happening. There needs to be plenty of daylight during the day, and at night, you need the ability to light the area well.

Remember: most bitches tend to whelp at night, and you will need to be able to clearly see what is going on even if it is 1 am or 2 am in the morning!

DV Breeder Series

Preparing the whelping area

Introducing your bitch to the whelping area

As she nears the end of her pregnancy, you will want to start getting your bitch used to the whelping area so that by the time she is due to whelp, she is relaxed and settled in there.

Moving to the whelping area can be a significant change in routine for any dog, especially one that is used to being a house pet and being involved in all the goings on of a busy household.

To start with, a good idea is to begin feeding her in the whelping area. This not only pairs the whelping area with a positive experience but also allows you to separate her from any other pets whilst she eats. She will be having more frequent, small, meals towards the end of her pregnancy, so there are a number of opportunities to do this each day.

With each meal, you can gradually increase the amount of time that she remains confined to the whelping area afterwards – starting with just a few minutes and increasing it over time to 15 or 30 minutes. Make sure there is some comfortable bedding in the whelping box, a bowl of fresh, clean water, and that the area is at a comfortable temperature.

At night, she should be introduced to sleeping in the whelping area. Although most bitches will happily sleep in the whelping box provided it has soft and warm bedding, you may find that moving her regular bed into the area outside the whelping box helps make things a little more familiar, and gives her another option.

This transition time is an opportunity to make sure that the whelping area is secure and safe, and that everything is working. Although your other pets may be interested in what is going on, they should not be able to get into the whelping area, and your bitch should not be able to escape it.

The area also needs to be child safe, and any children in the household will need to be coached in how they will have to behave both before and after the puppies arrive. Young children can be fabulous with puppies, but you don't want any unsupervised interactions. New mothers can be very protective of their babies, regardless of how wonderful their temperament is normally!

As she transitions into spending more time in the whelping area, you may need to get your bitch used to changes in toileting routine, especially if she usually has free access outside or uses a doggy door. Depending on the location of your whelping area, you may find that going back to being on lead and escorted directly from the whelping area to the toileting area outside helps prevent mistakes.

This is a perfect time to introduce the routine that you will follow once the pups arrive. Exercise, enrichment, grooming and time for social interaction are still important for your female, but they take place away from the whelping area. You may have to modify the amount and type of activities, and take things a little slower. The routine for everyone else in the household will also change – including family members and other pets – so now is the time for everyone to get used to the new normal.

Thinking ahead – as your litter grows

Although the whelping area is your focus in the weeks leading up to the birth, you will also need to consider where the litter will be housed once they outgrow the whelping box. Generally, puppies will start moving around and exploring from about 3 to 4 weeks of age. There will come a time where they will begin to escape from the whelping box. This is when the litter will need to start transitioning to a larger pen with some outdoor access.

You will need to plan ahead so that when the time comes, you have already prepared the area the litter will move to. This area will need to be secure so that puppies cannot escape and other animals cannot get in. It will need to have sleeping quarters that are warm, dry and out of the weather, as well as room to exercise and explore. Ideally, it will have a separate toileting area with an appropriate substrate such as grass, and plenty of room for puppies to play.





DOGS
VICTORIA
YOUR CANINE COMMUNITY

Section 4

Raising a Litter Of Pups

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As your bitch's due date draws closer, you will be excitedly anticipating the day she whelps her pups. You want to be prepared and ready for the birth well ahead of time. You will have already set up your whelping area and will have been transitioning your bitch to spending an increasing amount of time sleeping in the whelping box and being confined to the whelping area. Now you will need to make sure that you have everything on hand and are ready for the birth.

Calculating when your female should be due to whelp

The length of the canine pregnancy is generally accepted to be 63 days (or nine weeks) from the time of **ovulation**, plus or minus a few days. This is an average, so don't assume that the date you calculate will be the exact date your bitch will have her pups. You need to be ready to go, even if she whelps a few days earlier than you expect.

If you had progesterone tests taken as part of the mating process, your veterinarian can tell you when your bitch ovulated, and you will be able to calculate an accurate whelp date range.

If you did not have progesterone tests done, you will be relying on the mating date(s) to calculate when your bitch is due. You will have to allow both for multiple mating dates and for the fact that the mating(s) and ovulation could have been one or more days apart. This will give you a much wider range of potential whelp dates, and you will need to be ready for her to whelp anytime during that range.

Important!

If you reach the end of your expected whelp date range and your bitch has not shown any signs of whelping, first check you have calculated correctly. If the dates seem right, you should contact your veterinarian for advice.

If your bitch was bred to frozen semen, your reproductive veterinarian would have given you a definite date for whelping. It is crucial that you do not allow your bitch to go over this date even if she looks calm and settled.

The last week of pregnancy

Physical changes

As your bitch's due date draws near, she will be getting quite large. The growing puppies and uterus will be taking up most of the space in her abdomen, and you may find that she struggles to get comfortable at times. You will have moved to feeding her several small meals a day rather than one or two large ones, and you may find that her appetite varies widely from day to day.

Her teats may have begun to swell, and you may even notice that she has started producing milk. Some bitches will start producing milk a week or more before the birth, especially if they have had pups before. First time mums are less likely to do this, but every bitch is different.

Closer to the birth, you may see a change in the shape of her abdomen as the ligaments holding the uterus loosen. Her belly will 'drop', and the puppies may become easier to feel through the abdominal wall. This usually occurs about three or so days before birth.

Behavioural changes

It is normal for bitches at this stage of pregnancy to start withdrawing from social company, so you may find she is not interested in interacting with any other pets you might have. Some bitches become very 'clingy' with their owners; others continue as normal.

It is quite normal for bitches to begin 'nesting' in this last week. You may find she starts 'digging' – both outside in the garden or even inside or in her bed. She will be starting to look for a place to have her pups, so it is important that she is safely kept away from any places that would make access difficult should she whelp early. You will need to keep a very close eye on her, especially when she is outside.

Exercise

As she approaches full term, her exercise requirements will continue to change, and she will spend more time resting. Make sure she continues to have some gentle exercise, even if it is just a few laps of the backyard several times a day. Avoid any forms of strenuous activity, and let your bitch tell you when she has had enough.

Grooming

You will have been grooming and bathing your bitch throughout the pregnancy to make sure that her coat is clean and free from knots and tangles. As the whelping date approaches, you may want to trim or shave the hair around her teats and vulva if it is particularly thick or long. This will enable you to better see what is happening and will make keeping her clean after the birth a bit easier.

If your breed has long hair, lots of feathering, or a thick/tight coat, you may have to consider more trimming or clipping. Puppies can easily become tangled or trapped in long hair, so speak to your mentor(s) or other breeders about how they prepare their girls for a litter.

Remember that you may need to spread your regular grooming out over several shorter sessions if your bitch finds it difficult to sit or stand for longer periods of time.

Getting ready for the birth

As a breeder, you want everything to go as smoothly as possible during the birth, and for both the mother and the pups to have everything they need. A lot of a breeder's success in this area comes down to preparation.

A visit to the veterinarian

In the last week of pregnancy, it is a good time to have a visit to your veterinarian so they can make sure that your bitch is healthy and ready to have her pups and answer any questions you might have about the birth. They can talk you through the stages of labour and tell you when you should call for advice should things not be going to plan.

Your veterinarian may also recommend that an x-ray be taken so that they can assess how many pups are in the litter. The puppy's skeletons are starting to calcify at this stage, so both the skulls and spines are visible on x-ray. Knowing how many pups are expected is very valuable information. Most whelping difficulties occur with very small or very large litters, or where the size of the puppy's head is very large in relation to the mother's pelvis. Your veterinarian can use the x-ray to assess any potential risks and give you further instructions or advice.

Regardless of whether or not you have a pre whelping check with your veterinarian, you will want to confirm their availability should you run into difficulties during the birth. If your veterinarian offers an out of hours service, you will need to make sure they are aware of your bitch's expected whelp dates, and make sure you have the correct number(s) for contacting them if the clinic is closed.

If they do not offer an out of hours service, they will be able to provide you with the contact information for the nearest emergency veterinary service or out of hours clinic.

Clear your diary

Because you will not have a definite date or time to expect your bitch to whelp, you must plan ahead to make sure that you are able to be home in the lead up to the birth. Many breeders schedule leave in the days before the due date or make arrangements to work from home so that they can supervise their bitch and make sure they are home when things get underway.

You may also have to consider your back up plans should your bitch whelp a little earlier than expected – will someone else be available to pick the kids up from school, or take them to weekend sport? Making sure everything is organised can help take some of the stress out of whelping your bitch.

Important!

If this is your first time whelping a bitch, you may want to consider having your mentor or an experienced breeder come and sit with you during the birth. Make sure you let them know well ahead of time so they can also plan for the expected whelping dates.

You will also have to consider how you will manage in the weeks after the birth. Having a litter is a very time consuming job. First time mothers can need almost constant supervision until they settle into their new role. Most females give birth at night, meaning the breeder will have to sit up with them into the wee hours, and then spend the next couple of days supervising the mother and pups almost constantly. Some breeders end up sleeping next to the whelping area for a few days so that they can be woken if a puppy is crying, or wake up to supervise feeding times.

The time commitment continues as the pups grow and develop. There is the daily cleaning, feeding and exercise tasks. There is the handling, socialisation, and training of the puppies, the visits from potential puppy owners, and veterinary visits for DNA parentage swabs, for vaccinations and microchips. Even if your bitch is an excellent mother, you will not want to be away from the litter for more than a few hours at a time.



Make sure that you have everything you need for the birth

Having everything ready and on hand makes whelping the bitch much easier. You don't want to be racing around at the last minute looking for things, so make sure your whelping area is fully stocked, and you have all the items you are likely to need well ahead of time.

You are going to need:

- » Plenty of newspaper (staples removed)
- » Your Litter record sheet
- » Pen and Paper
- » Thermometer
- » Gloves
- » ID Collars/way of identifying each pup
- » Scales – accurate to grams
- » Towels
- » Cotton thread
- » Scissors
- » Hot Water Bottle or Heating Pad
- » Garbage Bags
- » Betadine™ or similar hospital grade disinfectant (ask your veterinarian for advice)
- » Mentor as back up
- » Your Veterinarian's Contact Number
- » The number of the nearest Emergency or Out of Hours Veterinary Clinic

Knowing when the birth is imminent

Behavioural changes

Probably the least reliable way to determine your bitch is about to whelp is to watch for behavioural changes. Some bitches will go off their food the day before whelping; others eat right up to the time of birth. Some bitches become very reclusive, others increasingly clingy. As discussed above, milk production and nesting behaviours are quite common even a week before the birth, so these are also not great indicators.

Generally, it is only when the first stage of labour has begun that you can truly use behaviour as a reliable indicator, and by then, the whelping is underway!

Although behavioural indicators can give some clues of the impending birth, there are several (more technical) ways of

predicting more accurately that the birth is imminent.

Temperature

The normal temperature for dogs is somewhere between 38 to 39 degrees Celsius. About 24 hours before birth, this temperature will drop below 37 degrees.

The dog's temperature is measured using a thermometer inserted into the dog's rectum. Because there may be droppings present, the thermometer must be pressed gently against the rectal wall to get an accurate reading. Otherwise, the temperature recorded may be artificially low. If you are not sure, ask your veterinarian to show you how to do it properly.

Monitoring temperature is simple and easy to do. It does not require fancy equipment, so it is a technique that all breeders can use. It is a good idea to start taking your bitch's temperature twice each day throughout the last week of pregnancy recording the result each time.

Progesterone level

From the time of ovulation, throughout the pregnancy, progesterone levels in the bitch will remain high. Just before the bitch is due to whelp, this level will suddenly decrease. Your veterinarian can use this to make sure that the bitch is truly ready to whelp - especially if they are considering performing a caesarean operation on a bitch who may have gone 'over time' and who is not actively whelping.

Whelping occurs within 24 hours of Progesterone dropping below 6 nmol/L

***Source: Gribbles Veterinary Pathology*

Stages of labour

First stage of labour

During the first stage of labour, the body is preparing for the birth. The hormone levels have changed, and the uterus is beginning to contract.

Although you will not necessarily be able to see the contractions, the uterus has already started moving the pups into position for the birth.

Bitches who are in the first stage of labour can be very uncomfortable – they shiver, shake, and pant. Their abdomen may be tense, and many will vomit (some several times). The nesting behaviours will intensify, with the bitch digging (sometimes quite frantically), shredding the paper in the litter box, and getting up and down as they try to get comfortable.

Although most bitches will be quite clingy at this stage, others will go and hide, so you need to be watching closely. The first stage of labour may last a few hours or up to a day. Every bitch is different. Some have a very long and intense first stage, and others who may not give any external signs and suddenly move into second stage labour (active pushing) midway through eating their dinner or taking a turn around the back yard.

You need to be alert to any changes in your bitch's demeanour and not leave her unattended for too long. Most bitches whelp during the night, so often the signs of the first stage of labour occur during the day, with the second stage of labour happening in the evening or early hours of the morning.

Important!

As soon as you see ANY signs of first stage labour, you immediately need to take your bitch to her whelping box, and you must continue to supervise her until the whelping is completed.

Second stage of labour

The second stage of labour is when the active pushing begins. Generally, the first pup takes the longest to be born. Your bitch will usually have a number of contractions that gradually get closer together. It is a good idea to record when the contractions begin so you can tell if she might be in trouble should things not progress.

The contractions will continue until a puppy enters the birth canal. This triggers a reflex, and the contractions will suddenly intensify. The bitch will begin really bearing down. Usually, after 4 to 5 of these really hard pushes the first pup will be delivered. The puppy may come out head first or tail first – both are completely normal presentations in the dog.

As the puppy is born, you will probably see a 'bubble' of fluid appear at the vulva first. After a few more pushes, you will see either a nose or some feet and a tail appear. Inside the uterus, each puppy is contained inside a sac of fluid and this may burst during the birth, releasing the fluid, or it may remain intact.

It is crucial that after the puppy is delivered, the sac is quickly broken and the fluid cleared from the puppy's nose so that it can breathe. It is usual for the mother to do this, but if she doesn't, you may have to step in and tear the membranes of the sac and work to clear the airways of any fluid yourself. Puppies that remain in their sac can actually drown in the fluid.

The pup should be moving and making noise nearly straight away. The mother will lick and clean the pup, which helps to dry it and stimulates it to breathe. You can assist with this if the mother seems slow to attend to a pup (especially if she has a couple of pups close together and can't keep up). Using a towel, you can gently support the pup in your hands and rub it (quite vigorously) to help dry it up and stimulate respiration.

Important!

Although most bitches will accept you touching and handling their pups during the birth, they will understandably be quite anxious about it.

If you are cleaning a pup, try to keep the pup fairly close to the mother, and let her sniff and lick it whilst it is in your hands. You don't want her getting up suddenly or jumping out of the whelping box as she could accidentally step on her other pups as she rushes to protect the pup in your hands.

Third stage of labour

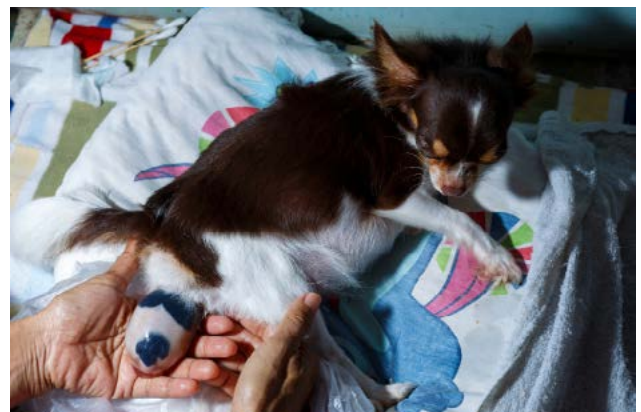
The third stage of labour involves the passing of the placenta – a thick, spongy piece of dark red tissue. The placenta may come out with the puppy, or it may be passed just after the pup (generally within 15 minutes of the pup being born).

It is perfectly normal for the mother to eat the placenta and to chew through the umbilical cord. You will want to supervise this to make sure she is not too rough, especially if she is a first time mother. The placenta can be quite heavy, so if the bitch does not eat it or chew through the cord, you may have to step in and tie off the cord yourself so that the pup can move to the teats.

You can use a clean piece of cotton thread to tightly tie off the cord about 1cm away from the pup's belly. After it is secured, you can cut off the remaining membranes and placenta and dab the tied off stump with some Betadine™ to prevent infection. The remains of the umbilical cord will gradually dry up and will fall off in a couple of days. You can also use this technique to tie off any cords that seem to be bleeding excessively.

Delivery of the rest of the litter

Your bitch will repeat the second and third stages of labour until all of the pups have been born. Once started, most bitches will usually continue to whelp pups at fairly short intervals. Still, the time between pups can vary quite widely from a few minutes apart up to an hour or two. Sometimes the gap is so short that she may not have time to fully deal with one pup before the next arrives, so you need to watch closely and step in and assist if required.



Important!

As each pup is born, you need to record the time of birth, weigh the pup and record its sex. You will need a way to identify each pup.

If you have a breed with different colours or coat patterns, it may suffice to take a photo of the markings or record the colour – i.e. black male, or red and white female, large patch over the right eye. If you have a breed where pups are all the same colour or similar in markings, you will have to identify them in another way, such as a coloured ID collar. Ask your mentor what they use.

Important first feed

Almost as soon as they are born, pups will start moving towards their mother's teats for a feed. Because they have minimal body reserves, it is crucial that they have a good feed as soon as possible. This first milk (called 'colostrum') also contains important antibodies that help provide the newborn pups protection from disease, so it is vital that all puppies have a good first feed.

Suckling also stimulates the release of the hormone Oxytocin in the mother. Oxytocin is involved in milk 'let down' (release) and contraction of the uterus.

If you have any pups that seem to be having trouble getting to or attaching to the teats, you can assist the pup onto the teat, squeezing gently at the corners of their jaw to open their mouth and pushing them onto the teat. Puppies will often latch on, but quickly fall off, so you may have to repeat this a few times until they are properly suckling. Sometimes expressing a tiny bit of milk before placing the pup on the teat will give them the right idea.

The rear teats are often the 'best' ones, so you should aim to put any smaller or freshly whelped pups onto those teats, and move bigger pups who have already had a good feed onto the front teats. Your mentor will be able to show you how it is done.

When will I know she is finished whelping?

If you have had an x-ray taken in the last week of pregnancy, you will have a very good idea of how many pups to expect. However, you need to remember that the count might be out by a pup or two with large litters.

Generally, once she is finished, your bitch will settle, and there will not be any further contractions. She will focus on cleaning and feeding her pups, and she may have a little sleep. However, it is not uncommon for bitches with a larger litter to rest or take a nap in between pups, especially towards the end of the litter.

Whelping a litter is physically demanding, and there are a number of things that may go wrong. Low calcium, fatigue, and uterine inertia (where the uterus stops contracting even though there are still pups) can all look very similar to a bitch who has finished whelping, so you want to make sure there are no more pups before assuming the whelping is complete.

When you think she is finished whelping, it is a good idea to stand your bitch up, and have a gentle feel of her abdomen. It should feel soft and 'empty' - you should not be able to feel any more pups. Pups can feel like a firm 'sausage' in amongst the soft contents of the abdomen, or you might be able to feel the hard bony skull of a pup.

When things don't go as planned

Although the majority of bitches whelp their pups easily, with little to no intervention, there can be times where there are problems and assistance is required. This is where having an experienced breeder sit with you during your first few whelpings can be a huge benefit – they can show you what to do. They will have a good idea of what is normal and what is not, and they will know when it is time to call for expert help.

Although your role as the breeder is primarily to supervise the birth – watching quietly, reassuring your bitch, and documenting all of the stages as they happen - you should be ready to assist if necessary. In most cases, this will involve things such as breaking the sacs around the pups and clearing away fluid so they can breathe, cutting and tying umbilical cords, rubbing and drying pups, or assisting pups onto the teats for a feed.

If your bitch seems to be having a little trouble passing a pup, and the pup is visible or partially out, you may be able to assist with the delivery. If you need to do this, it is important to grasp the pup gently, and in time with the bitch's next contraction, gently provide a little traction to help move the pup. You should be pulling out and downwards – in the direction of the bitch's back feet. If this does not help, then you should immediately seek advice.

Don't be afraid to call for help if you think something is not right. Getting good advice and, if necessary, veterinary intervention early can be the difference between a successful outcome and losing one or more pups or even your bitch.

Many reasons may cause difficulties or complications in the birthing process (called 'dystocia'):

- » Uterine inertia (where the muscles of the uterus stop contracting)
- » Hypocalcaemia (low body calcium – required for normal muscle contraction)
- » Fatigue/Exhaustion (especially with large litters)
- » Puppy too large
- » Dead, malformed or abnormally positioned puppy
- » Mother's pelvis and birth canal too narrow

Sometimes it is hard to tell if the bitch is experiencing difficulties, or if she is just progressing normally through the process. Below is a rough guide to the expected time frames for whelping, and events that should trigger a call to your veterinarian.

You should seek assistance if there is:

- » *More than 30 to 40 minutes of strong contractions with no pup*
- » *More than 15 minutes of contractions with a pup visible*
- » *More than 3 hours between pups*
- » *A green discharge from the bitch's vulva with no puppy born*
- » *A yellow or creamy discharge from the bitch's vulva*
- » *Lots of bright red blood coming from the bitch's vulva*
- » *A female who is very restless, crying or licking frantically at her vulva or who seems very distressed*

Remember: These are estimates only, and you should check with your veterinarian as to when they would prefer you to call them for advice or bring the bitch to the clinic.

If your bitch is having trouble, your veterinarian will want to examine her – feeling for any pups that might be stuck in the birth canal, and assisting if required. If there are no blockages, your veterinarian may decide to give the bitch an injection of Oxytocin to stimulate uterine contractions and see if she will pass a pup. They may also provide some calcium and fluids via a catheter.

The next option may be to perform a caesarean section operation, where the remaining pups are removed from the uterus surgically. A caesarean operation can be performed at any time during the whelping, and it is not uncommon for a bitch to have most of the litter, then require a caesarean for a remaining pup or two at the end. Alternately, if the very first pup gets stuck, the entire litter may end up delivered this way.

In very rare cases, usually where there have been complications during the pregnancy, your veterinarian may schedule an elective caesarean. In this instance, the bitch has the operation before she even goes into labour, or as the very first stages begin.

Because the mother requires an anaesthetic for the caesarean surgery, the pups will also be affected by the anaesthetic agents and can be a bit slow to get started. There will also be increased after care as the mother of the pups will have stitches (usually along her mid line, in between her teats), and may take a little longer to recover from the birth and bond with her puppies.

Your veterinarian will provide you with additional care instructions and provide you with ongoing advice if a caesarean operation is required.

After the birth

When you are happy that your bitch has finished whelping, you will need to clean both her and the whelping box. Whelping is a

messy process!

You will need to move the pups into a basket or box with a heating pad or covered water bottle, so they stay nice and warm. Then you will need to remove all of the soiled bedding/newspaper, before cleaning and disinfecting all of the surfaces of the whelping box. Shredded newspaper is excellent for whelping as you can just scoop it all up, place it in a garbage bag and throw it out.

You will want to replace the bedding with something a little softer and warmer than just paper – most breeders use a layer of newspaper (to absorb any liquid) covered with a layer of 'dry bed'. Still, you can use anything that is easily cleaned, and that provides a suitable soft bed for the mother and pups. Remember thick bedding may seem super comfortable, but you don't want pups accidentally getting trapped in the layers of bedding, and you need the bedding to be able to be washed and dried quickly.

If you haven't already, now is the time to set up your heat lamp at a safe height over one end of the box. The heat lamp will need to remain on for the first few weeks and needs to be at a height that does not pose a risk to the mother as she gets in and out of the whelping box.

Now is also the time to take your bitch outside (on leash) for an opportunity to toilet. She will be reluctant to leave her pups, but a quick stretch of the legs will be good for her, and she can be offered some food and drink. If her coat is soiled with discharge and afterbirth, she may need a quick bath, but make sure she is properly dried before returning to the pups and the whelping box. She will continue to have some discharge for up to 2 weeks, so you might need to rinse off her hindquarters once or twice a day to start with.

Once everything is clean, you can return everyone to the whelping box, and make sure they are all settled. Place the smaller pups, or those born later, straight on the rear teats, and make sure that all pups have a nice full looking belly before leaving them all to rest.

Post whelping check

Even if the birth was uneventful, most veterinarians recommend that you have a post whelping check within 12 to 24 hours of the delivery.

As the litter will most likely have been born overnight, usually this is scheduled for the next morning. At this visit, your veterinarian will want to check that your bitch has passed all of her pups, that her discharge is normal, and that she has adequate milk in her teats. They will also check the pups over, looking for things such as cleft palates, and checking that their umbilical stumps all look clean and dry.

If your bitch has whelped a large litter, your veterinarian will want to discuss feeding strategies to ensure all pups have a good chance to grow. They may recommend supplemental feeding and will show you how to safely feed the pups, and recommend a suitable formula.

Congratulations on your new litter!

Your litter is finally here! All that planning, waiting, and anticipation is over. Now you start the next exciting phase of breeding – making sure that your pups have every opportunity to grow and thrive.

The first few days can be critical, so you want to make sure both the pups and their mother have everything that they need. If any problems begin to develop, you want to make sure that they are addressed quickly, so your pups have the best chances of survival.

Most breeders will agree that the time from whelping through to the end of the first week is the hardest and most demanding time for any breeder – especially if their bitch is a first time mum.

Regular checks are vital

In those first few days, you will find yourself spending a lot of time checking in on your litter. In fact, many breeders end up sleeping next to the whelping box and waking up several times through the night to check everything is going smoothly, that all of the pups are suckling, and that the mother is not accidentally trampling or lying on her pups as she tries to get comfortable.

Many bitches can be a little unsettled in the first few days, especially new mums, and it may take a little while for them to get into the routine of being a mother. During this time, you may need to closely supervise to make sure that the needs of the pups are being met, and that the mother has every opportunity to recover from the birth and settle into her new role.

It may take a day or two for your bitch's milk production to swing into full production, so you need to make sure that the pups are getting enough to eat, suckling properly, and that everyone is warm and safe. You may even have to assist the pups onto the teats, and encourage the mother to lie still whilst the pups feed.

Checking the pups

Probably the best way to make sure that the pups are doing well is to weigh them regularly. You will have recorded a birth weight for each puppy during the whelping, so you have a start point for each pup. Although it is not uncommon for puppies to remain the same or to lose a little weight in the first 24 hours, from then on, they should be gaining weight every day even if it is only a few grams.

For the first few days or even the first week, most breeders weigh their pups twice a day, transitioning to once a day weigh ins once everyone is reliably gaining weight. You will need to make sure that you have a way of identifying each individual pup – either by their markings, colour, sex or via some other identifier such as a coloured ID collar – and make sure you record the weights in your litter records.

Weighing allows you to identify pups who may need extra help to keep up with the rest of their littermates, well before they get dehydrated or unwell. By identifying those pups that may be beginning to fall behind the others, you can make sure they get priority on the better teats at the next feed or give them an opportunity to feed without having to compete with their littermates.

Important!

*If you have a pup that is **losing** weight (other than a few grams in the first 12 to 24 hours), you should seek the advice of a veterinarian. Puppies can become dehydrated and weak very quickly if they are not feeding properly or not getting enough milk. Weak puppies struggle to suckle so things can quickly spiral downhill. Your veterinarian can determine the correct treatment and can show you how to safely supplement any pups that require it.*

If you have a large litter where there are more pups than the mother has teats, you may have to rotate the pups in groups to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to have a good feed. Some mothers manage to feed a large litter quite successfully, but you may need to supplement her milk with a suitable dog formula if the pups are not all gaining weight at the same rate. Ask your veterinarian for advice on supplemental feeding if you think it might be needed.

Each time you weigh the pups, you should also gently handle them all over and check them from head to toe. They should have a 'full' looking belly that should not be hard or painful to touch. Their nostrils should be clean and dry. You should pay particular attention to the area where their umbilical cord was attached. If there is a 'stump' remaining, it should gradually dry out and fall off. There should be no bleeding or discharge from the stump, and the area around it should be clean and dry. If your pups are wearing ID collars, you need to check that they are secure but not too tight.

Contented pups generally sleep most of the day. When they wake up, they will often move around and make some noise before the mother licks and cleans them, stimulating them to go to the toilet. Most mothers will consume the faeces/urine, although some do not. The pups will then head to the 'milk bar' for a feed, falling off the teats when they are full and drifting back to sleep.

Like human babies, puppies usually only cry when they are cold, hungry, find themselves separated from their mother or their littermates, or are in pain (such as when their mum accidentally sits or lies on top of them). So, as a breeder, you will learn that a happy litter is a quiet one.

If you have pups that seem to be constantly crying, something is likely to be wrong – so make sure that everyone is warm, no one is trapped or getting squashed, and that mum has plenty of milk.

Checking mum

As your bitch settles into her new role as a mother, you need to be checking her regularly. First time mothers can find the first few days of having a litter a bit overwhelming, but they should soon settle into a routine as their milk comes into full production and their uterus starts to contract and recover from the birth.

The aim is to have the mother calm and for her to lie down with the pups, rather than continually getting up and down. Every time the bitch gets up and down, there is the risk that she will accidentally lie on a pup as she resettles, so you need to make sure that the whelping box is comfortable for her (both in regards to temperature and bedding) and that disruptions that might cause her to get up are minimal. She should spend most of her day alternating between sleeping, licking and cleaning the pups, and feeding them.

It is normal for all mothers to be protective of their babies. In the first few weeks, your bitch may behave quite aggressively to any 'intruders' who threaten her pups. Make sure that you keep all other pets well away from the area, and try to keep visitors to a minimum. Although it is a very exciting time, and everyone will want to see the pups, now is not the time to have family and friends over – that can come later when things have settled down. First time mothers, in particular, can become very unsettled if there is too much going on, and this is something you want to avoid.

After the birth, your bitch will continue to have a discharge for a few days, reducing in volume each day through the first week. The discharge should be similar in colour to that during the birth - expect any colour from dark red through to green black. The discharge should never be creamy coloured, and it should not have an odour. As part of your routine, you will need to continue to keep your bitch clean and free of knots – bathing, grooming or clipping as required.

Important!

Your bitch should be examined by a veterinarian if she continues to have significant discharge for more than a few days after the birth, if the discharge is bright red (fresh blood) or creamy in colour, or if the discharge has an unusual smell.

As part of your daily checks, you should both visually check and feel each one of her teats – checking the milk flow and feeling for any lumpiness, heat or soreness.

Any female animal that is producing milk is at risk of developing 'mastitis', a condition where the breast tissue becomes inflamed and/or infected. Mastitis can come on very suddenly and can be quite serious. The affected teat usually becomes red, hard, and painful to touch, and the milk coming from the teat can become thickened and discoloured. The bitch often has a very high fever and may become lethargic and stop eating and drinking altogether.

Important!

If you have any concerns about lack of milk flow or think that your bitch may have the first signs of mastitis, she should be checked by a veterinarian immediately.

For the first few days, the bitch may be very reluctant to leave her babies. You may have to put a leash on her and escort her outside for her to toilet. Most bitches will be in a hurry to return to their pups, but make sure she has properly emptied out before returning. For the first few days after the birth, you may notice her bowel motions are a little loose, and very dark. This is due to the amount of afterbirth she will have eaten, so don't be too concerned. Her motions should return to normal within a day or two.

As her food and water dishes will be outside of the whelping box (so the puppies cannot accidentally fall into them), you also need to make sure she is eating and drinking enough. Making milk takes lots of fluids and nutrients, so it is important to encourage her to eat and drink. She should be eating a high quality diet, and fresh water should be available at all times. Make sure that food is fresh and changed regularly if you plan to leave it out for her to access rather than serving 'meals'. Lactating bitches have very high nutritional needs, so if you are feeding meals, she should be having at least two a day, if not more.

Now is the time to begin supplementing her diet with calcium. You should ask your veterinarian which supplement is best for your bitch, and how much you should be giving her. Some breeders like to offer their bitches milk to drink as well as fresh water. Milk contains some calcium, and can often tempt a fussy bitch to drink more fluids. As dogs cannot digest the lactose found in cow's milk, you should look to feeding a dog friendly milk, puppy formula, or lactose free option (ask your veterinarian to recommend a suitable product). You do not want your bitch ending up with a tummy upset, so only offer small amounts to start with, or try diluting it by mixing a little bit into a second water dish.



Getting the temperature right

Newborn puppies cannot regulate their temperature and lack the ability to shiver. They are reliant on their mother and littermates for warmth. They can quickly become chilled if they become separated from them. Once chilled, they start to lose their ability to suckle, and can quickly become weak and dehydrated.

Up until around four days of age, puppies prefer an ambient temperature of approximately 32 degrees, but you will find having the entire whelping area at this temperature will be uncomfortably hot for the mother. If the mother is too hot, she will tend to be quite restless, getting up and down, or getting in and out of the whelping box, potentially scattering or trampling her puppies every time she moves.

You can provide additional heat for the litter via a safely covered hot water bottle or heat pad, using a heated whelping box or a heat lamp. Each method has its own pros and cons – but most breeders agree that a heat lamp hung over one corner or end of the whelping box is usually the best.

The heat lamp allows both the pups and the mother to choose the place that they are most comfortable by moving closer to, or further away from the lamp. It is not uncommon to see a sleeping pile of pups under the heat of the lamp, with mum sleeping happily on the other side of the whelping box.

Cleaning and Hygiene

Now is the time to get into a routine in regard to cleaning. Every day you will need to move the puppies into a box or basket to keep them safe and warm, remove all of the bedding, clean and disinfect the whelping box, and then set everything back up with clean bedding. You will also need to clean and disinfect food and water dishes, and any other utensils that you use. Make sure all traces of disinfectant are rinsed well away before use.

This is an excellent time to examine, handle and weigh the pups as you will be moving them in and out of the whelping box anyway. If mum is likely to get in the way whilst you clean, it might be time for her to get some fresh air and have an opportunity to stretch her legs and go to the toilet outside.

Although many bitches keep their nesting area scrupulously clean, there will be times, especially with larger litters, where the bedding becomes soiled with post whelping discharge or the urine and faeces of the pups. Every time you check the bitch and puppies, you should make sure that any messes are cleaned up straight away. Depending on your situation, you may find that you need to do a full bedding change and clean more than once a day, but once a day is the absolute minimum.



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter - weeks 1-2

The first two weeks of raising a litter can undoubtedly be a most stressful time – especially if you are new to breeding and your bitch is a first time mother.

Having a good mentor can certainly help. They can sit with you through the whelping, check in regularly to help you make sure everything is going smoothly, and are more than happy to share the knowledge they have gained from breeding successful litters.

Your veterinarian is also an excellent source of accurate information and advice and should be your first point of contact if anything looks amiss.

The first two weeks of a puppy's life are called the 'neonatal period'. During this time, puppies are reliant on their mother for everything necessary to survive.

At this age, a puppy's eyes and ears are not yet open, they cannot regulate their own temperature, and they require stimulation to assist with toileting. Their world is relatively small, and they rely on their senses of smell and touch more than anything else.

Keeping things calm and stress free

Once settled into motherhood, your bitch will spend most of her day in with her pups – feeding them, cleaning them and lying with them to keep them warm. She will usually only leave to eat and drink or to go to the toilet herself. Both the mother and the pups will spend a good part of the day sleeping.

During these first few weeks, you need to be making sure that things remain reasonably calm. This means minimising visitors and disruptions as much as possible. Although everyone will want to see your new pups, now is not the time to have lots of friends and family over – they can come and visit once the litter is a little older. If you have children, they need to be supervised around the whelping area at all times.

Remember that new mothers can be very protective of their babies and can behave quite aggressively if they feel that their pups are threatened. For this reason, all other pets should be kept well away from the whelping area, even though they will be attracted by the smells and sounds of the litter.

Caring for the mother of the litter

Your bitch will hopefully have settled into being a mother fairly quickly. Although first time mothers might be a bit overwhelmed to start with but they generally only take a day or so to get into the routine of cleaning and feeding their pups. If your bitch had a particularly difficult birth, or if she required a caesarean operation, you may find that it takes a little longer for her to recover and get into the swing of motherhood.

If your bitch remains very unsettled, you need to first check that the whelping box and whelping area are not too hot. Although the pups need to be kept warm, if the bitch is too hot, she will be very restless. This can lead to her accidentally standing or lying on her pups as she gets up and down trying to get comfortable.

Another reason that bitches become very unsettled is if the puppies are crying, or if she is in pain. Pups generally only cry if they are hungry, cold or separated from their mother and littermates. They will also cry if their mother accidentally sits or lies on them – which is a very good reason for her to get up!

If the pups are crying, the first thing is to check that they feel warm to the touch. Next, you should check that your bitch is producing sufficient milk by gently expressing a few of her teats. If there does not seem to be good milk flow, or if the teats seem painful, she should be seen by your veterinarian immediately.

Feeding the lactating bitch

Lactating bitches have very high nutritional needs, so monitoring her feed intake is essential. You want to make sure that she is eating enough to maintain her own body and grow her pups. Over the first two weeks, her milk production will gradually increase – reaching its maximum at about 2 to 3 weeks – this is the time of peak demand on her body.

Important!

Your bitch needs to be eating high quality, nutritionally complete food and drinking plenty of fluids. She may also require supplemental Calcium.

Speak to your veterinarian about the diet you plan to feed and make sure it is suitable for the heavy demands of lactation.

*Regardless of what you are feeding, you need to make sure that the food is always fresh, and that your bitch is fed **AT LEAST** two or three times a day.*

In the first week, many bitches are so intent on looking after their pups that they may not even want to get up out of the whelping box to access their food and water bowls. If this is the case, you may have to regularly bring the bowls to her to encourage her to take in enough food and water.

Important!

DO NOT leave food and water bowls inside the whelping box as there is a risk that the pups could accidentally tip them or even fall in and drown.



Some breeders choose to leave a bowl of dry food in the whelping area outside the whelping box so the bitch can access food at any time. If you decide to do this, it is best to only provide a meal's worth of food in the bowl at a time. You can then make sure any uneaten food is disposed of and replaced with fresh dry food a number of times throughout the day, rather than having the food go stale or spoil. You will also have to be careful that any food you leave out for the bitch to access does not attract pests such as ants.

Important!

Because her nutritional needs are so high at this stage, if your bitch stops eating, goes off her food for more than a meal or two, or is vomiting you should contact your veterinarian immediately for advice.

Daily health checks

Twice each day you should be checking your bitch all over - from head to toe - noting any changes or potential problems. It is usual for her to continue to have some discharge for the first week, but this should slowly dry up as her uterus begins to return to normal. Any discharge should be dark red to greenish black in colour - it should never be creamy in colour or have a strong odour.

At every check, it is important to feel each one of her teats - checking the milk flow and feeling for any lumpiness, heat or soreness. Any bitch producing milk is at risk of mastitis (infection and inflammation of the breast tissue), and it can quickly become life threatening to a bitch whose body is already under a lot of stress.

Mastitis can come on very suddenly. The bitch will usually have a very high fever, become lethargic or even unable to walk. One or more of her teats may appear red and hard, and they are often hot and painful to the touch.

The milk produced in the affected teat will change from a normal colour to a greenish yellow colour and can become very thick and clotted, coming out in lumps. Sometimes, the teat infection builds up like an abscess and bursts, leaving large open wounds and permanently damaged breast tissue.

Important!

If you have any concerns about abnormal discharge, lack of milk flow or think that your bitch may have the first signs of mastitis, she should be checked by a veterinarian immediately.

Grooming and exercise

Even though your bitch will be busy with her pups, she still needs a little daily exercise and individual attention. This may simply be a few laps of the backyard, a game, and a little bit of time outside in the fresh air. Although she will most likely be very anxious to get back to her pups, you can encourage her to move around, even if you have to put her on a leash to do it.

If you have other pets who will be in the yard, you will need to supervise any interactions closely, especially to start with. Your bitch will smell very interesting, but she may not want other dogs approaching her or sniffing her. She may also be a bit anxious being away from her litter and may be concerned that the other animals might get access to her pups. Make sure you manage any other pets to minimise the risks of upsetting your bitch, and make sure that they cannot gain access to the whelping area whilst you are not there.

Don't forget to check her coat all over for knots or tangles. The combination of nursing puppies and increased licking and cleaning can easily cause the hair to start to matt. You may need to take some time out to groom your bitch - combing out any knots, or trimming additional hair away. Some bitches require almost daily bathing to keep them clean in the first week or so, even if it is just rinsing the area around the tail and vulva, and down the back of the legs.

If you are bathing your bitch make sure that she is dry before she returns to the whelping box as you don't want the pups getting wet and chilled.

Caring for your new litter of pups

At this age, the biggest risks to the pups are cold and hunger. Pups can dehydrate very quickly, and they have little to no body stores, so they need to feed frequently to survive and grow. Your main priorities should be to make sure they are getting enough to eat, that they remain safely in the whelping box, and that the whelping box is kept at the right temperature.

Generally, the pups will naturally huddle together, often forming a 'pile' under the heat lamp. The whelping box should prevent pups from getting too far away. Still, occasionally a pup may become separated from the rest of the litter. These pups generally cry quite loudly, and the bitch may get up to either nuzzle them towards the rest of the litter or even pick them up and carry them gently with their mouths.

If you do find a pup that has been accidentally separated from the rest of the litter and feels a bit cold, you should warm it up straight away. Chilled pups quickly lose their suckle reflex, and then become dehydrated because they cannot feed. If they don't feed, they become weak and quickly spiral downhill.

You can warm a puppy up on a heat pad or covered hot water bottle, or can use your own body heat by tucking the pup up inside your shirt until you have the hot water bottle organised.

If you have a puppy that might have been chilled, you need to watch closely that it is feeding correctly. Often these pups look like they are feeding, but they are not sucking properly, and therefore don't get enough milk to return to normal. If you have any concerns, please ask your veterinarian for advice.

Supervising feeding time

In the first week, you should be weighing the pups twice each day, and making sure that all of the pups continue to put on weight. Weighing the pups allows you to identify any pups that might be falling behind or not getting enough to eat, well before they become dehydrated or weak.

Even after a day or two, you will notice that the bigger stronger pups will start to push their smaller brothers and sisters out of the way so that they get the best access to the teats, so your job is to supervise feeding time and make sure everyone gets a fair go.

Any pups that have not put on weight, or the pups who have put on the least amount of weight, should be given priority at the next feed. Usually, this means physically placing those pups on the teats at the back (these are usually the 'best' teats in terms of milk production), and making sure that the stronger pups do not knock them off. You will be amazed at how persistent the stronger pups are!

If you have a large litter, you may need to rotate the pups in groups for feeding so that everyone has the opportunity to have a proper feed, or you may need to supplement feed some or all of the pups. Your veterinarian will be able to recommend a safe puppy milk supplement and show you how to feed the pups.

Important!

*If you have a pup that is **losing** weight (other than a few grams in the first 12 to 24 hours), you should seek the advice of a veterinarian. Puppies can become dehydrated and weak very quickly if they are not feeding properly or not getting enough milk. Weak puppies struggle to suckle so things can quickly spiral downhill.*

Your veterinarian can determine the correct treatment and can show you how to safely supplement any pups that require it.

Daily checks for your puppies

Every puppy in the litter needs to have some individual handling and a health check at least once a day. Regular gentle handling is an integral part of a puppy's social development, even though the pups cannot see or hear properly at this time.

Most breeders incorporate handling, weighing and health checks with daily cleaning of the whelping box as the pups have to be moved to facilitate the cleaning. The pups are transferred to a basket or box with a heating pad or hot water bottle in it whilst the whelping box is stripped, cleaned, disinfected, and the bedding is replaced.

As each pup is returned to the litter box, it is weighed and checked all over, and the pup's daily records are completed.

As you check each puppy, you want to make sure that the pup has gained weight, has a full but soft belly, is clean, and feels warm. If it is wearing an ID collar, you need to check and adjust it to ensure it is secure but not too tight. You also want to check that the remnants of the umbilical cord (if any) are clean and dry and that there are no signs of injury, redness or irritation anywhere on the puppy.

As you go over each puppy, you need to check their feet and feel between their toes, making sure that they don't have any of mum's hair tangled around their toes, and that they have not accidentally stepped in any droppings.

Finally, you need to check the puppy's toenails and make sure that they are not getting too long or too sharp. If they are, you can carefully trim the tip off using a pair of nail clippers.

As they get a little older

As the puppies get a little older, handling can extend to having a variety of people gently hold them for short periods of time. In a typical family household, this happens anyway as family members have a little 'cuddle time' with the pups each day, but you may even allow a few select visitors to handle the pups at this stage.

As you watch the puppies, you will see that they are slowly developing strength in their legs, and they will start transitioning towards supporting their own weight. Somewhere between days 10 and 14, you will notice that the puppy's eyes begin to open, and not long after that, their ears. This is always an exciting time as a whole new phase of development is about to begin.

Worming

When they reach two weeks of age, it is time for the puppy's first worming treatment.

Puppies are commonly infected with Roundworm as it passed to the puppies through the mother's milk. Because their mother is cleaning the puppies and ingesting their droppings, the worm infection can cycle back to her – so everyone needs to be wormed at the same time.

Your bitch will need to be weighed and dosed with an '*allwormer*' product – ask your veterinarian to recommend one that is safe to give to lactating bitches.

Each of the pups will also need to be weighed and dosed with an appropriate amount of 'puppy wormer' – a liquid wormer is often easiest to give at this first worming as the pups are quite small. Your veterinarian will recommend an effective product and can show you how to dose the pups safely.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter - weeks 1-2

Cleanliness and hygiene

One of the most important jobs as a breeder is keeping everything in the whelping area clean. Having a litter is a very messy business!

By keeping everything scrupulously clean, you reduce the risks of disease transmission – both for the mother and the pups.

The whelping box and whelping area should be cleaned out thoroughly every day – regardless of how clean it may look. This means removing all used bedding, cleaning and disinfecting all of the surfaces of the whelping box and the surrounding whelping area, cleaning and disinfecting food and water bowls, and then setting everything back up and placing clean, fresh bedding in the whelping box once it is dry.

Important!

Whenever you are cleaning, remember to carefully follow the instructions on any cleaning products, detergents or disinfectants you are using, and make sure you rinse any food or water bowls thoroughly before using them again.

Although most bitches keep the whelping box area scrupulously clean, there will be times where the bedding becomes soiled with post whelping discharge or the urine and faeces of the pups. If this is the case, you need to see to it straight away to prevent puppies crawling through it on their way to get a feed.

With larger litters, or bitches who are not keen to eat their puppy's droppings, you may find yourself doing a full cleanout two or three times a day to keep things clean, so you need to be prepared with plenty of clean bedding at the ready.

Enjoy your litter

Although having a litter is a lot of hard work, it is also quite a magical time. Most breeders find themselves simply sitting and watching the mother and pups for hours on end.

Already there will be characters developing within the litter – the pushy pup, the one that is always off exploring, and the one that sleeps in all kinds of odd positions. You will also have a newfound respect for your bitch, and marvel at how she has transitioned from a valued family pet to a dedicated and attentive mother.



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 3-5

Weeks 3 to 5 of a litter is arguably the most enjoyable time for any breeder. The pups are thriving, and their mother has settled into the routine. She is starting to be a little less protective and anxious about her pups, and the need for constant supervision has reduced. The pups are starting to move around and develop characters, and it is easy to spend hours just watching them as they learn and explore.

Developmental milestones

From week 2 to week 3 is termed the 'Transitional Stage' as the pups transition from the 'Neonatal Period' into the 'Socialisation Period' of development (more on this later). Their eyes and ears begin to open, and they begin to be able to support their own weight and move around. They start to interact with their littermates and explore their world.

They are no longer totally reliant on their mother for toileting. Their baby teeth will be beginning to erupt, and by the third week, they will be ready to begin the first steps towards weaning (although this may take a little longer in toy and smaller breeds).

The pups are continually developing muscle tone and coordination. They start to get up on their feet and move around and may even begin escaping the whelping box.

By the 4th week, puppies are starting to play with each other and their mother, their little tails now wag, and they begin to vocalise – barking and growling at each other. For most breeds, the transition to solid food will be well underway, and their mother will be spending less time each day in with the pups.

Housing considerations

Your whelping area will have been ideal for the first few weeks of life, allowing for warmth and security, containment and supervision. As the puppies grow and mature, you will find that they soon begin escaping the whelping box. It will be time for the litter to move to more spacious quarters more appropriate for the next period of growth and development.

If you have a large litter or a large breed of dog, this will probably occur sooner than with toy breeds or very small litters simply due to space considerations.

A new puppy pen

Depending on the location of your whelping area, and the type of facilities that you have, you may simply be able to open up the area you are already using, or it may be time to move the litter to a new location. Ideally, the expanded puppy quarters will have the facility for direct access to a secure area outdoors and will be warm and draught free.

Your whelping box will most likely become the familiar 'bed' in the expanded puppy area, but with the 'door' now opened so that the puppies can safely get in and out of the whelping box as they choose. Outside of the whelping box or bed, there will need to be access to areas for play and exploration, toileting and fresh air.

Initially, the area for the pups outside of the whelping box should remain fairly small, but gradually expand as the pups grow and develop. Most breeders gradually increase the amount of access to areas outside the litter box as the pups grow by using temporary fencing/barricade arrangements that can be repositioned as required.

Important!

Make sure that any temporary fencing or barricades are well secured. Both the mother and pups may knock it, jump up on it or try to climb it and you don't want anything to collapse or fall on them.

Although your bitch will still have access to the puppy area, you need to make sure that she can rest and sleep away from the puppies if she chooses. She should have a separate raised bed outside of the whelping box where she can rest, and you may find that for a large part of the day she chooses to be away from the pups.

At this stage, you will most likely transition to feeding your bitch away from the puppy area, so her food and water bowls can be outside the puppy area. You will still need to provide access to water inside the puppy area, but this should be done in such a way as to minimise the risks of a puppy tipping the container or accidentally falling into the water bowl.

One idea is to provide water for the bitch in a water bowl that is hung high enough that she can easily access it, but the pups can't. You will also have to provide water for the pups in a separate bowl (or bowls) – something shallower and much lower – but still well anchored and unable to be tipped.

Substrate preference and toilet training

Puppies are naturally very clean – they instinctively do not want to soil the area they sleep in. This behaviour develops at about three weeks of age when the puppies first start to toilet without their mother's stimulation, and when puppies first become able to move around on their own.

At this very early age, they start to develop a 'substrate preference' – this is an important life lesson where they learn what type of surfaces are for sleeping and which are for toileting. So there needs to be a definite difference between the two.

As a breeder you can facilitate this learning by providing a toileting area that is made of the substance you would like the pups to toilet on as adults – usually grass – that is very different from the bedding in the whelping box. Although this may seem difficult to achieve, a piece of roll out turf (which you can buy at Bunnings) sitting in a flat tray, or on a tarp can be used even in an inside puppy pen to provide a toileting area.

Some breeders choose to use a 'litter box' (filled with cat litter) or commercially available puppy 'pads' instead of grass, which will work just as well to provide a toileting substrate but may add an extra step to the toilet training if the end goal is for the pups to toilet outside.

The main thing is to provide a substrate that is **different** to that in the whelping box/bed. Litters of pups who have newspaper (or similar) both inside and outside of their whelping box miss the opportunity to learn this skill and can be much harder to toilet train later on. They grow up thinking the entire world is a toilet!

Because the pups cannot 'hold on' for very long, and their motor skills are just developing, this toileting area needs to be right next to the whelping box to start with. As they grow and are better able to move around, the toileting area can gradually move further away from their bed, and they will actively seek it when they need to toilet. As the puppies get bigger and more active, they will have access to outdoor areas as well, and their 'toilet' can transition to outside provided they have access at all times.

Regardless of what you choose, the toileting area will need to be kept scrupulously clean. Your bitch will no longer be cleaning the pups and eating their droppings so there will be plenty of puppy poop to pick up, especially if you have a large litter. The toileting substrate will need to be cleaned several times during the day and changed over completely at regular intervals.

Areas for play and exploration

Your expanded puppy area will also need room for the puppies to play and explore safely. There needs to be space for toys and other items, and plenty of room for the pups to move about.

Most breeders will begin giving their pups access to outdoors at this age. Depending on the weather and time of year, this might be for short, supervised periods to start with, but then expanded to free access during the day as the pups get to an appropriate age. Outdoor areas allow pups to romp and sniff and can have larger, more complex activities or items for them to interact with.

Important!

The puppy pen's outdoor area needs to be securely fenced – keeping your pups safe from other animals and ensuring they cannot escape. There needs to be shade and shelter, and protection from inclement weather.



Caring for your bitch – weeks 3-5

As your pups reach about three weeks of age, the demands on your bitch's body will reach their highest point. This is the time of maximum milk production. She needs to be eating and drinking well, and you will need to be feeding her 2 to 3 times a day (maybe more if she has a large sized litter) to help her keep up with the demands of raising her litter.

As the pups are growing stronger, they will be feeding more vigorously, and extra care will need to be taken to ensure the hair on her sides, legs and near her teats does not become knotted or matted. As the pups get bigger, you will notice that the bitch may now feed them in different positions – maybe as she is sitting or standing instead of lying on her side.

You will also notice that your bitch will begin spending more time resting away from her pups, and the interval between feeds will begin to get longer. Her breaks from the pups will allow for a little more exercise and social interaction to occur, and she should be more relaxed about interacting with your other pets. You still need to watch that she does not get too protective of her pups, and make sure that your other pets are safely housed away from the litter of pups.

With milk production at its highest, the risk of mastitis continues to be significant, so you need to be checking her teats every day as you complete her daily health check, and seek advice should any of her teats feel harder or hotter than the others.

Eclampsia

Bitches whose diet is deficient or unbalanced are at high risk of developing another life threatening condition called eclampsia. Eclampsia occurs if calcium levels drop below a critical level. Because calcium is vital for many normal body functions, including muscle contraction, bitches with eclampsia can deteriorate very quickly.

Eclampsia is most common in smaller breeds or bitches feeding a large litter, but any lactating bitch is at risk. Bitches who have eaten an unbalanced/incomplete diet before and during pregnancy, or who have been over supplemented with calcium whilst pregnant may be predisposed to developing this condition. It is most commonly seen at the peak of milk production but can occur at any time the bitch is producing milk.

The signs of eclampsia can come on quite suddenly and generally begin with weakness and restlessness. This quickly progresses to shivering and shaking, salivating, and trouble walking or moving around – your bitch may look wobbly or 'drunk' as she moves (called 'ataxia').

Soon they are unable to stand, and the shivering and spasms become full blown convulsions. If the calcium deficiency is not immediately addressed the bitch will lapse into a coma.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 3-5

Important!

If you think that your bitch has any signs of mastitis or eclampsia, you must contact your veterinarian immediately. Both conditions require urgent veterinary treatment.

Weaning the pups

Weaning the pups off their mother's milk and onto solid foods is a natural process that occurs over several weeks. The interval between feeds will be getting longer and longer, and the pups will start to erupt their baby or 'milk' teeth, making feeding a little less pleasant for the bitch when they suckle.

The weaning process will usually begin when the pups reach around three weeks of age. As a breeder, you can start to offer the pups some soft, almost sloppy food, and gradually transition them to eating solids and even gnawing on hard items by 6 to 8 weeks of age. During this phase, the pups continue to drink milk from their mother, but the amount and frequency of feeds will decrease as their nutritional needs start being met by the solid food.

It is not uncommon for bitches to begin the weaning process themselves by regurgitating food for their pups (usually stimulated by the pups licking at her face and lips). Although this may seem a little unpleasant to watch, the semi digested food is perfect for the pups and, in the wild, teaches them what is safe to eat.

The bitch will also begin restricting the pups access to her teats. This may be by getting up and walking away when she has had enough or even telling them when feeding time is over by growling or snapping at those pups who continue to feed.

Of course all bitches are different – some seem to lose interest in their pups quite early, others will continue to nurse and feed well past eight weeks of age. You need to allow your bitch to interact with her pups to the level she feels comfortable, and allow her to tell her pups off (provided she does not actually hurt them). Young pups are learning important life lessons at this time, and if you step in, you may deprive them of this.

Important!

Your bitch should continue to have access to her pups until AT LEAST 6 weeks of age.

It is not appropriate to 'force wean' a bitch – whereby she is abruptly separated from her pups – unless instructed to do so by your veterinarian for medical reasons. Sudden weaning can increase the risks of mastitis as milk pools in the teats. Instead, your bitch's milk production needs to be allowed to gradually dry up over time.

Once your pups have reached three weeks of age, you can try them with a little bit of food. At this age, they are not ready to chew their food, so whatever you use needs to be able to be lapped up by the puppies. Because the pups are still beginning to get up on their feet and are not particularly coordinated, you will want a flat dish or plate with some food in it to allow them easy access.

For their 'first food' you can use puppy dry food that has been soaked in warm water, canned puppy food, or specific puppy 'starter' foods. Many breeders over the years have used 'Farax' baby food or Weetbix soaked with milk or water, so there are many options. Some start with just puppy milk – ask your mentor what they use for their litter's first feed.

Important!

You do need to be mindful that puppies lack the enzyme required to digest lactose, so regular dairy products are unsuitable and may cause the pups to have diarrhoea. You can look for puppy milk, or use milk replacer designed for puppies, both of which have reduced lactose and have been formulated to prevent tummy upsets. Ask your veterinarian to recommend a suitable product.

At this first feed, the pups are likely to walk through the food and get food all over them, so many breeders choose to try feeding either outside, or somewhere that can be easily cleaned and does not mess up the puppy pen.

It may take several days for all of the puppies to get the hang of eating from a dish, so be patient and be prepared to encourage the pups by placing them in the correct position and even putting a little food on their lips to get them started.

You should time the offering of solid foods to coincide with the pups waking up and looking for a feed, and not try just after they have been suckling on their mother. It usually only takes a few feeds before the pups get the idea, and you can move to offering them food in a shallow dish two or three times each day. You will soon find they come running when the food dish comes out!



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Caring for your litter – weeks 3-5

The food offered can also transition gradually to a thicker/firmer consistency. Make changes gradually over a number of feeds, and watch that the pups are eating well. At the end of each feed, you will need to dispose of any leftover food, but you will quickly get an idea of how much to prepare so that everyone gets a good feed and the dishes are licked clean.

All the pups can be fed from the same dish at this stage, but you need to make sure that there is plenty of space for all the pups to have access. There are always one or two greedy pups who gobble down their food and who will push others out of the way to get more. You need to make sure that you supervise each feed, and ensure everyone gets a fair go.

If you have a large litter, it may be easier to use several dishes of food, allowing better access for the smaller and less assertive pups. You want to make sure everyone has a full tummy when the meal is over, and make sure you clean food off any pups who have walked through it, or had it smeared over them by their littermates.

Important!

In most cases, you will want to exclude your bitch from the puppy's feeding times. This encourages the pups to eat from the dishes rather than suckle on their mother.

Depending on their temperament and appetite, some bitches are also very keen to eat the puppy food and can become a little protective of the dish when the pups approach – growling and snapping at the pups as they try to eat.

Instead, give your bitch a little time out, let the pups have a feed, and once the bowls are all empty and have been picked up, she can be let back in with them. She will most likely clean them up and give them a small 'top up' feed of milk.

During weaning, the bitch's milk production will gradually decrease. Some bitches can become quite uncomfortable with teats full of milk, and if that is the case, you should allow the pups to suckle to reduce the pressure. At this time, there is a slight increase in the risk of mastitis due to the combination of stagnant milk and the risk of exposure to increased bacteria from the feet of exploring puppies. So be super vigilant with checking your bitch's teats.

Caring for your puppies – weeks 3-5

Health care

You will need to continue to give every puppy a full 'all over' health check every day. You will be looking for any scratches or wounds (often caused by their littermates during feeding time or rough play), and checking everything looks normal from head to tail. If your pups are wearing ID collars, you need to check they are secure and not too tight.

You should continue to trim your puppy's toenails as required – you will be amazed at how quickly they grow! Trimming the toenails helps prevent injuries to your bitch's teats and to other pups in the litter and also promotes correct growth and development of the feet.

Important!

You should seek veterinary advice if you find any injuries or abnormalities, or if a puppy has signs of illness. Early intervention is vital in youngsters, and if something is amiss, you don't want to risk it spreading to the entire litter.

Until now, you will have been weighing, handling and checking each pup once or twice a day. Although you may still want to closely monitor your smallest pups, once the pups have doubled their birth weight, the frequency of weighing can reduce. At this stage, weekly weigh ins are fine.

The kitchen type scales will no longer be suitable for larger breeds, and you will have to transition to using human scales. If you start by weighing yourself and then weigh yourself whilst holding each pup, you can safely and accurately work record the weight of each pup.

At four weeks of age, this weight will be used to calculate the dose of worming product required for their second worm treatment. At this second treatment, you will most likely transition to a worming tablet rather than a liquid. This will treat more types of intestinal worm and can be given much easier now that the pups mouths and heads have grown. Your veterinarian can suggest a suitable product for the size of your pups.

The importance of socialisation

What is the socialisation period?

From 3 weeks through to around 12 to 14 weeks is the 'Socialisation Period' – recognised as a crucial part of puppy development.

Puppies will be learning what is normal in their environment - becoming accustomed to the sights, smells, sounds and textures that make up their world. Puppies at this age are naturally very inquisitive, and are quite bold, exploring their world.

Every experience a puppy has during this time provides information about the world around them. Socialisation involves exposure to people of different ages, people with hats, people with beards, people with high voices, and deep voices. Exposure to different sights and sounds, textures, places, and animals of all kinds.

Scientists have shown that a young puppy will 'absorb' all of these experiences during this window of time and, as long as they have not been unpleasant, will categorise them as 'normal'. It is also a time when puppies learn how to interact with others – people, dogs, cats, etc.- and learn appropriate manners and communication skills.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 3-5

If they are deprived of these learning opportunities, they may not develop the skills to interact well as a mature animal. They will also be more likely to be fearful or at least suspicious of situations, sounds or individuals when they first experience them as an adult.

The flip side of this is that negative experiences at this early age, can lead to life long fears, so care has to be taken to minimise any negative interactions. Therefore, the goal is to provide plenty of positive experiences early on without overwhelming the puppy.

The breeder's role in socialisation

As a breeder, your role is to provide your puppies with a variety of positive experiences and opportunities to learn as they develop and grow. Already you will have spent lots of time handling each puppy, but from this age, through to the time the puppies head off to their new homes, your goal will be to make sure your puppies have every chance to develop the skills they will need later in life.

Handling

From weeks 3 to 5, the puppies need to meet and be handled by gentle and friendly people of all ages and sizes, especially men and children. This is a great time to have your potential puppy owners come to visit – you get to meet the family and answer their questions, they get to meet the mother and pups, and your puppies are given the opportunity to meet new people – everybody wins!

You want to get the pups used to typical types of handling and petting, physical examination all over their body, grooming tools and techniques, and gentle restraint.

Introducing other animals

Initially, your pups will need to get used to exploring their outdoor puppy pen or your backyard on their own, or under the supervision of their mother.

Some mothers (especially first time mothers) can get over-excited the first few times the pups are outside. They suddenly decide to play with the pups even though the pups are only just starting to get the hang of walking, and can be a little rough. Other mothers will be a little anxious that their pups are wandering around and will be trying to herd them up or carry them back to their bed area.

Take things slowly, and watch both the puppies and their mother closely. You may choose to end the experience early the first few times so that things remain calm and positive. Once they are used to being outside with their mother, you may want to give your puppies opportunities to see or interact with other species – this could be anything from livestock, to other pets such as cats, rabbits or guinea pigs. If this is the case, you need to make sure everyone is safe – not just the pups!

If you are going to allow your puppies to interact with your other dogs or even your pet cats you need to make sure that all interactions are closely supervised, and that the older animals are well behaved around young pups. Please don't assume that because your pets all get on well, that they will automatically behave appropriately around small puppies.

Regardless of how well behaved they may be, you may need to step in if the pups are overwhelming your other pets or the other pets behave in a way that could frighten or hurt the pups. Some older dogs are so excited to play that they are a bit rough or bounce around as they try to encourage the pups to interact. They are just too exuberant.

Some adults become anxious if they get 'mobbed' by the pups. It is not uncommon for pups to try to suckle on someone who is not their mother (not fun if you are an adult male!). If this is the case, don't wait for the adult to tell the pups off – step in and separate everyone, and let things calm down.

Toys and play

A large part of the pup's daily routine at this age will be spent playing with each other and with their mother. Through play, they develop motor skills and strength, coordination and balance.

Many of the interactions teach lessons in canine group dynamics – assertiveness, conflict resolution, body language and general doggy rules and manners.

Play can also involve learning and rehearsing behaviours used in hunting and killing prey – stalking, chasing, pouncing, and biting. The biting is an integral part of the pups learning to control their jaws – called 'bite inhibition'. Pups can be quite rough with each other, and it is not uncommon to see personalities emerging as the pups find their place in the social structure.

The pups will also spend a lot of the day exploring and interacting with all sorts of objects – this can be anything from toys that have been provided, to their bedding, to everyday items found in their puppy pen or outdoors in the garden. A lot of this exploratory behaviour involves mouthing and chewing – it is oral exploration.



This is a great time to provide a variety of 'safe to chew on' objects of all different textures, sizes and hardness. You can provide fixed or mobile objects, hanging toys, toys that make a sound and toys that move by themselves. If the pups are not interested in an item, you can make it more interesting by smearing a little food on it, or by making it 'come to life' by playing with it.

Important!

All toys should be checked daily for any damage and cleaned and disinfected as required. It is a good idea to rotate or vary the toys – having a few out each day rather than every single toy at once. This introduces novelty and ensures that the pups are not overwhelmed.

Sounds, smells and surfaces

Exposure to a variety of sounds, smells and surfaces is also an important part of the socialisation process.

If your pups are housed inside your home, they will already be experiencing the sounds and smells of a typical family – the excitement of children coming home from school, dinner cooking, the television and the sounds of home appliances.

If your pups are housed in a quieter area, or your household is not a busy one, you may want to consider how you might help your pups familiarise themselves with noises they would otherwise not experience until later in life.

You may want to have a radio playing in the puppy area, or use recordings of everyday sounds such as vacuum cleaners, microwaves, televisions and other appliances. There are a variety of sound CD's and recordings available, everything from the sounds of the country to the sounds of the city.

There are also recordings of the noises that are commonly frightening for adult dogs - heavy traffic, motorcycles, children, thunderstorms and fireworks.

These can all be played **very quietly** in the background in your puppy area provided that neither the pups or their mother show any signs of anxiety listening to them. Over time, the volume can gradually increase. The scary noises can also be paired with positive activities such as feeding time.

Because dogs live in a world where scent is their primary sense, they will already be focussed on new and unusual smells. You can create interest and novelty by placing scented objects in their pen as part of your daily enrichment and socialisation programs.

For those pups destined to perform tasks such as hunting or scent detection, now is the time to introduce them to objects and smells that will be important to them later in life.

Finally, you want to allow your pups to experience different surfaces to navigate across. Rough surfaces, small obstacles, slippery surfaces and even unsteady, irregular or mobile surfaces can form part of their learning.

Many breeders provide small ramps, platforms or other safe and small obstacles in the puppy pen for puppies to play on and learn to navigate. Pups may be given a chance to walk on tiled or vinyl floors, carpet or floorboards, rather than just concrete or grass. You will see the pup's confidence grow as these all become just part of their normal world.

You want your pups to explore at their own pace, but have the opportunity to see, smell, hear and feel many things. The possibilities are endless and really only limited by your imagination. The main thing to consider is that you do not want to overwhelm the pups with too many toys, experiences or activities at once. There still needs to be quiet time for sleeping and resting, and you do not want to have any puppies get hurt or frightened.

Although you will find loads of ideas on the internet – from elaborate play gyms to entire socialisation 'programs' you do not have to spend a lot of money to provide excellent socialisation opportunities. Cardboard rolls, boxes, and other items that you might otherwise place in the recycling bin at home can all become toys and objects of interest. Regular household items, items from the garden and shed, and family and friends can all become part of the program.

You just need to spend some time thinking about experiences that will help your puppies develop to their full potential and encourage normal behaviours and emotional resilience.



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 6-8

Weeks 6 to 8 are generally a very busy time for breeders. The pups are becoming much more independent and mobile. They are now eating solid foods, and only occasionally suckling from their mother. They sleep less and are far more active and inquisitive. You will spend a large part of every day feeding, cleaning and providing learning and socialisation opportunities for the litter – both as a whole and individually.

You will also be starting to prepare for the day they will leave their mother and littermates and head to their new homes. There will be a very important veterinary visit for vaccination and microchipping, and the new owners will be visiting or contacting you regularly for updates.

Once the puppies have been microchipped, you will need to have DNA samples collected to meet the parentage verification requirement for registering your litter.

You will be assessing your litter, making some decisions about which pup or pups you plan to keep, and matching the remaining pups to their new homes.

Developmental milestones

From 6 to 8 weeks, the pups will continue to grow and become more and more coordinated as their nervous systems develop. Play between pups becomes rougher and noisier, and you will see the various pup's characters are really beginning to develop.

Although every mother is different, generally the amount of contact time with the pups will be decreasing. You may also notice that your bitch is starting to set rules and boundaries in regards to the pup's behaviour, telling them off if they start getting out of line.

By around the eighth week, the pups will have a full set of puppy teeth. They will already be using these teeth on everything as they begin to learn the all important skill of 'bite inhibition'.

You may also see the first signs of a fear response – possibly to everyday objects or experiences. This is perfectly normal – there is a 'fear period' that occurs around 8 to 11 weeks which is part of normal development.

Housing considerations

Your litter will now be spending more and more time each day exploring their world, playing and interacting with each other. Although puppies continue to sleep a lot of the day, the awake and active times will be becoming longer.

The amount of space they require will be increasing, both due to their size and the need for different areas for toileting, eating, sleeping and exploration. Generally, the litter will be 'locked in' at night (both for their own safety, but also to encourage them to get into a routine of sleeping at night) and allowed out during the day into a safe area.

The housing area needs to have protection from all kinds of weather, along with a warm raised bed. The need for an external heat source is diminishing (unless the weather is particularly cold) now that the pups can better regulate their own temperature.

The pup's outdoor area needs to be safe from potential hazards and securely fenced. There will need to be clean, fresh water available both 'inside' and 'outside' in appropriately sized dishes or bowls. Water dishes must be mounted so that the pups cannot tip them, and there is no risk of them falling in and drowning.

You will be feeding the pups 3 to 4 meals each day. This can be a very messy event, so most breeders prefer to have a dedicated place or area for feeding that is easy to clean. Pups can continue to share a feed dish. However, you may find that having several dishes, or even individual bowls for each pup can help prevent the bigger, bossy pups from stealing everyone else's food.

Your puppy area will need to have a toileting area, and you will need to keep this super clean. It is amazing how much poop a litter of pups can generate in a day! By now the pups should be moving away from their bed and toileting outdoors, or onto a suitable substrate provided for toileting inside. They still cannot 'hang on' for very long, but you should see bladder and bowel control improving as they mature.



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 6-8

Caring for your bitch – weeks 6-8

The physical demands on the mother of the litter are now starting to decrease. The weaning process will be well underway, and your bitch may be spending less and less time in with her pups. As the pups transition onto solid foods, milk production will begin to start decreasing.

During your daily health checks, you will need to watch that your bitch's teats do not become too engorged with milk. This is both uncomfortable for her and can increase the risks of mastitis developing. If the teats seem hard or a little uncomfortable, you can encourage the pups to have a small feed, or gently express a little milk to reduce the pressure.

Weaning should be gradual, allowing the bitch's milk production to taper off naturally and allow the pups to transition to eating solid foods. The weaning process also includes important learning events for the pups – the bitch will begin teaching the pups that access to the teats is not always allowed. There will be times where she moves away or even tells pups off as they go to suckle.

She will also provide feedback if they suckle too roughly, so you might see her discipline a single pup whilst others are allowed to continue to feed. This is normal. Puppies are great actors; they will scream and cry like they have suffered a horrific injury when often all that has happened is the bitch has growled at them.

There is no need to step in unless you can see a pup is truly getting hurt. These are essential life lessons about manners and appropriate behaviour the pups need to experience.

Important!

You should never 'force wean' the pups by totally removing access to their mother unless instructed to do so by your veterinarian for medical reasons. Suddenly or prematurely removing the mother has consequences for both the pups and the bitch and can lead to ongoing behavioural and medical issues.

As her milk production starts to decrease, her nutritional requirements will also begin to ease off. For most bitches, now is the time to start reducing the amount of food she is eating so that she does not put on excess weight. If your bitch has lost weight, now is the time that she can start to recover.

You will need to assess her body condition each day and feed her accordingly. Generally, she should start returning to two meals a day. If you changed her diet to a more calorie dense food during pregnancy and lactation, gradually transition her back to her regular food.

As you feed the pups or give them access to treats, you will need to watch that your bitch does not try to resource guard any food items. Although many bitches are happy to share, some will become very possessive of high value items. If you are tapering her daily intake of food, she may be a little more hungry than usual, so be prepared for her to behave differently.

Your bitch's daily routine will begin to return to her pre-litter 'normal'. She may spend a large part of her day with the family or with other pets, visiting her pups a number of times a day. She will also need time away from the pups to exercise and play, and you can gradually work on returning her to her normal level of fitness.

Important!

It is a requirement that your bitch undergoes a 'post partum' health check by a veterinarian (DV Regulation 20.8.3). Your veterinarian may refer to this as a post-whelping check.

For many breeders, this will take place in the 24 to 48 hours after the birth, but if you have not yet had this done, it can be scheduled to occur at the same time as the puppies have their 6 week health check and vaccination.

Dogs Victoria has a template '[Post Whelping Veterinary Certificate form](#)' that you can print out and take with you for your veterinarian to complete and sign. Details of this health check need to be kept as part of your bitch's records.

Caring for your puppies – weeks 6-8

You will need to continue to give every puppy a full 'all over' health check every day. You will be looking for any scratches or wounds (often caused by their littermates during feeding time or rough play), and checking everything looks normal from head to tail. If your pups are wearing ID collars, you need to check they are secure and not too tight as the pups may be growing so quickly that adjustments are needed almost daily.

You should continue to trim your puppy's toenails as required – you will be amazed at how quickly they grow! Trimming the toenails helps prevent injuries to your bitch's teats and other pups in the litter and also promotes proper growth and development



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 6-8

of the feet.

The pups should now be offered meals 3 to 4 times a day. Although the first meals will usually be sloppy or softened food, you can gradually transition them to food that requires some chewing. By 6 to 8 weeks of age, they should be able to eat dry kibble and chew on raw bones or other chew items designed for puppies.

Chewing, mouthing, and gnawing are all important activities for pups. You will find that they put pretty much everything in their mouth during this period. You need to make sure that they cannot access anything dangerous to eat or chew. You can also encourage 'appropriate' oral behaviours by providing safe chew items – both edible and non edible – and maintaining their interest by rotating or changing them often.

Providing opportunities for oral exploration can be simple and doesn't require expensive high end toys. You are aiming to provide a variety of textures and shapes and a variety of food items that require chewing. This can be achieved by crafting chew items from safe objects found in a typical household, using toys specifically designed for chewing and offering various chewy foods and treats that are safe for pups.

Important!

Whenever you make changes to the pup's diet, you may find that their droppings become a little loose. Changes can include the addition of novel chew items such as raw bones, commercial chews or treats.

If the pups droppings remain very loose, contain any signs of blood, or the pups seem uncomfortable when toileting, you should consult your veterinarian for advice immediately.

Health care

Aside from your daily health checks for both the mother of the litter and each pup, there are a few important health care milestones during this period.

Both your bitch and the pups will require worming when the pups reach six weeks, and again at eight weeks of age. Generally, at this point, worming will involve dosing with a tablet, and each individual's weight will be used to calculate the correct dose. Your veterinarian will be able to advise you on the best product to use now the pups are bigger.

Important!

Ensure you record the product used and the dose given for each animal every time you worm them – both the pups and your adult dogs.

Generally, at six weeks of age, the pups will undergo their first formal veterinary health check. Your veterinarian will examine each pup thoroughly and provide you with a signed veterinary health certificate that you need to keep with each pup's records.

You want to keep this first veterinary visit very positive, so try to book a time with your veterinarian when they are not super busy, and take plenty of treats with you. Most veterinarian clinics these days are very aware of the need for positive associations, and their staff will go out of their way to ensure your pups have a pleasant experience.

If your veterinarian notes any health issues, you will need to discuss whether these are likely to impact the pup moving forward, and document them on the puppy health check paperwork. Some things may be noted that will resolve with time or not impact the pup's future health, but if there are more serious issues picked up at this visit, you will need to disclose them to any potential homes.

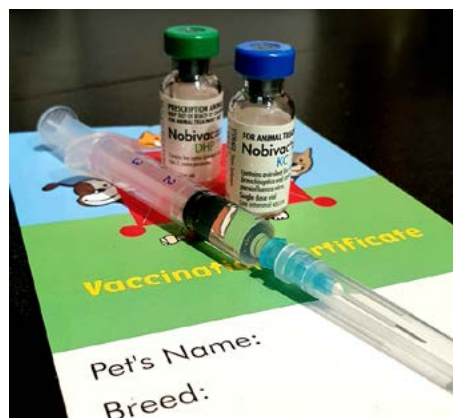
Important!

Dogs Victoria has a template '[Puppy Health Check Certificate](#)' that you can print out and take with you to this visit. Many veterinarians have their own version, but the Dogs Victoria template can be used to ensure you meet your record keeping requirements if they don't.

At this visit, each pup will receive its first dose of vaccine. This is usually a single injection covering the three 'core' diseases that can kill young pups – Distemper, Parvovirus and Hepatitis.

Your veterinarian will provide each pup with a vaccination certificate that will clearly show which vaccine was used, and when the next dose is due (usually when the pups are 10 to 12 weeks of age). The vaccination certificate will need to be provided to the new owner with the puppy's documentation and health records.

Dogs Victoria [has a Fact Sheet](#) that explains vaccination and immunity to disease in more detail but, as always, consult your veterinarian for advice on appropriate vaccination protocols for your particular situation, location



DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 6-8



and risk level.

In most cases, the pups will also be implanted with a microchip at this visit. The microchip is placed under the skin in between the pup's shoulder blades. It will remain there throughout life, providing an identifier that can be scanned with a special reader.

Microchips are tiny – about the size of a grain of rice – and each chip holds a unique 15 digit number. The number is paired with information, such as owner contact details, on a central registry database.

In Victoria, all pups must be identified with a microchip prior to sale (even if given away). The microchip number also forms part of the Dogs Victoria Litter Registration process. Only certain people are permitted to implant microchips. The [Domestic Animals Act](#) has an entire section relating to microchipping, the recording of 'prescribed information' and the management of microchip registry databases.

Microchipping not only provides each animal with a unique identifier, they are used to reunite lost animals with their owners, resolve ownership disputes, and to identify individual animals for the purposes of health testing.

At the time of microchipping, you will need to provide all of your details as the pups' owner. You will also need to provide your 'Source Number' allocated by the Victorian Government Pet Exchange Register. Your veterinarian will then send details of the microchips implanted and all of the implantation and ownership information required to a licensed 'Domestic Animals Registry' for inclusion on their database.

You will receive confirmation that the pups have been added to the database directly from the registry (usually about a week after the implantation occurs). You will also be provided with 'Change of Ownership' forms for each pup so that once the pups move to their new homes, the information held on the database

can be updated to reflect the new owner.

Important!

When it comes time to complete your Litter Registration you will be required to either attach one of the microchip barcode stickers for each pup directly onto the hard copy application or upload a signed [Veterinarian Microchipping Certification Form](#). You need to ensure that you take any necessary paperwork with you at the time of the microchipping visit.

DNA Testing

From 1 January 2026, Dogs Victoria will require breeders to provide DNA parentage verification for each puppy in the litter. You will need to supply results for each puppy at the time of submitting your litter registration.

Puppies cannot be DNA tested until they have been implanted with a microchip, and the 'approved, independent collector' will need to scan the microchip at the time of taking the DNA sample.

You may choose to have your veterinarian collect the samples at the same visit as the microchip and vaccination at six weeks, or you can arrange for an approved collector to do it.

You need to remember that DNA results will usually take a week or two to come back, and this is required **BEFORE** your litter registration can be completed. Therefore it is important that you are organised. Having the kits ordered and ready, and making sure that both the sire and dam already have their DNA Profiles completed will streamline the process.

If you are concerned about meeting the timelines for litter registration, you can talk to your veterinarian about having your puppies microchipped earlier than the 6-week vaccination visit to facilitate DNA sample collection to occur earlier.

If your breed has known health issues that have a DNA test, it is also an opportunity to have **BOTH** the DNA Profile (required for parentage verification) and the health testing done at the same time, allowing you to know the health status of each puppy prior to evaluating your litter and sale of your puppies.

The continuing importance of socialisation

The socialisation period is now in full swing. The experiences that your pups have now will shape their adult character and prepare them for living in modern day society.

You will already have been working to provide plenty of positive experiences – handling, grooming, novel items and experiences, toys and play. Still, you will be looking to expand this further as the pups continue learning and growing.

DV Breeder Series

Caring for your litter – weeks 6-8

Now they are more active and coordinated, you can introduce more complex activities and items. In their pen or in the yard, there might be things to climb on, through or under, surfaces that are a little unstable or slippery to walk on. Items that move or make unusual noises.

The pups are now old enough to begin some basic training using positive reinforcement techniques. To do this, you may want to work with each pup individually. However, nothing is stopping you (or your family and visitors) all using treats to reward desired behaviours in the presence of the other pups.

You can start with some basic manners training such as coaching polite greeting behaviours, teaching 'sit', 'drop' and 'coming when called' or even walking on a leash. Allowing gentle restraint, physical examination and grooming should also be high on the list of behaviours to reinforce.

If your breed is one used for a specific activity, such as hunting or herding, you may want to start with some basics that encourage those innate behaviours. If you have plans to compete in conformation showing or dog sports, now is the time to establish the positive associations and lay down the building blocks for future training.

All of your puppies can have a little 'alone time' – brief sessions away from their mother and littermates. You can introduce a 'crate' (a pen or cage with a soft bed and some toys in it) and get pups used to short periods of confinement in preparation for car travel, trips to the veterinarian, and for providing a safe and familiar space in their new home.

Any behaviours or experiences that will assist with the transition into their new home, and being away from their littermates can help set puppies up for success and decrease the stress of moving to a new home.

Important!

Dogs Victoria has a [Fact Sheet on Crate Training](#) for both dogs and puppies. A crate can provide a safe space within the home, assist with early toilet training, and assist with travel, transport, and veterinary visits. You can download a copy from the Dogs Victoria website. You may also want to include it in your puppy pack information for new owners.

Your puppies should continue to meet and interact with a large variety of people, especially well behaved children. Now is the time to have everyone come and visit – new puppy owners, neighbours, and the kid's friends.

If you don't have children yourself, you should look to inviting family and friends who have children to visit your litter. Of course, all interactions need to be supervised, and all children need coaching on how to play with and handle the pups appropriately.

If your puppy pen/enclosure is now outside in a garage, kennel or shed, your pups still need to experience a busy household and the noises and smells associated with it. If they are inside the house most of the day, they need to experience the garage or shed.

The opportunities for socialisation, training and enrichment activities are endless and a little researching on the internet, through your mentors, or breed clubs should give you plenty of ideas.

Remember, all experiences need to be positive, and you should not overwhelm the pups with too many activities. They still need time to sleep, and time to play with their littermates or interact with their mother.

Remember negative experiences at this age can have quite significant impacts, just as lack of experiences can.



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Section 5

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DV Breeder Series

Assessing your litter

Before you even mated your bitch, you will have had a set breeding goal in mind – maybe it was to breed a pup to show, breed or compete with. Perhaps you had requests from other breeders for a puppy to help further their breeding programs, or maybe you had several wonderful homes waiting for a new pet. Potentially a combination of all of these.

From the minute they were born you will have been watching and assessing your pups – observing their temperaments as they develop, looking at how the pups are coloured and marked, how they carry themselves, and how they are constructed.

During this high growth phase of their lives, pups change almost daily. They may grow at different rates, so it is not uncommon for the puppy that looked amazing one week, to look awkward and uninspiring the next.

After spending so much time with the pups, you will no doubt have your favourites! One of the biggest skills of any breeder is being able to find the best puppies in the litter – the ones that best match the breed standard. Assessing your litter takes quite a bit of objectivity. Although they will all seem utterly adorable, you need to be able to stand back and be honest about the merits of each pup and the quality of the litter as a whole.

Get opinions from people you respect

If you are new to breeding, now is the time to utilise your mentors, other breeders, and licensed judges to provide their opinions on your litter.

Not only do they have years of knowledge, but they are not emotionally attached to the litter so they can just observe the pups on the day and form an opinion based on what they see. They will also have an idea of how the breed grows and matures.

You will learn a lot from having a variety of people (both from within your breed and from other breeds) assess and grade your litter. Nearly every person will have a slightly different take on the breed's priorities – some will focus more on specific breed features. Others will look more at the overall picture – so listen and learn!

Remember that having several people over for a 'puppy grading party' might be a lot of fun, but can be counter productive if there are one or two personalities who tend to take over or dominate the discussion. You want to hear everyone's thoughts on the pups, so maybe scheduling separate visits may end up being more productive.

If you have used an external stud dog, the stud dog's owner will most likely be interested in what their dog has produced, so make sure you invite them to view the litter.

When is the best time to assess a litter?

Although there are breeders who may argue for a different age, the majority will say that the best time to assess your pups is at eight weeks of age.

At this point in time, they will be the closest in proportions to their adult form and will have developed their temperament and 'carriage' (how they hold themselves both standing and on the move) to a point where you can get an insight into the future adult.

Most breeders will also do a preliminary assessment of their litter at six weeks of age. This assessment coincides with their veterinary health check and first vaccination, so there may be things that the veterinarian detects that may influence your choices. Although you may make some early decisions, be prepared for things to change by the time the pups reach eight weeks.

A good idea is to take photos of the pups as they grow and develop. Many breeders will start training their pups to stand (often called 'stacking') on a table from about five weeks of age. This allows them to take a set of 'stacked' photos at six weeks and again at eight weeks.

Photos can be a great way to compare puppies and are a valuable resource later on when your pups are adults as you can go back and look at how they matured.

Tip:

When taking 'stacked' puppy photos, try to make sure that the pictures are all taken from the same distance and angle. A good idea is to set up your table, and then have the photographer sit on a chair in front of the table to take the photos. That way, the photos should all be similar and will allow a better comparison of the pups.



What are you looking at?

When assessing a pup, you are aiming to compare what is physically in front of you, with the 'perfect' example of the breed outlined in the breed standard. How closely does this puppy match the description? Where does the puppy excel, and where could it improve? Does it have the required breed characteristics (hallmarks) that set the breed apart from other breeds?

As a new breeder, it may help to sit down with your breed standard and write yourself a checklist. That way, as each puppy is examined, you can record your comments (or the comments of others) and at the end compare the pups on each point as well as overall.

You will need to consider:

- » **Overall shape and balance required for the breed** – this gives the breed its correct outline/silhouette. You will be looking at the length of body, length of leg, and the overall proportions of all of the body parts. This is usually assessed by standing the puppy (often on a raised surface such as a grooming table) and viewing it from the side, front and rear.

Tip:

If you don't have anyone to help you, setting up a mirror means you can hold the pup, and still view it from a distance.

- » **Breed Specific Traits & Breed 'Hallmarks'** – every breed has attributes that set them apart from other breeds – does the puppy have these?
- » **Movement and Carriage** – does the pup move in the manner described in the standard? Does it hold itself correctly in regards to head and tail position?

This is something that you will need to assess with the pup moving freely on the ground. Avoid using a leash at this stage, as you want to see what the puppy does without any influence from a handler.

- » **Temperament and Instinct** - Does the puppy show the required temperament and instinct? This is particularly important in working breeds.

Temperament and instinct may be one of the highest priorities if you or one of your puppy buyers are looking for a pup to train for a specific sport or task. This could be anything from hunting or herding ability to drive and trainability for dog sports or assistance dog work – each task requires a particular set of behavioural attributes.

- » **Health Criteria** – You may have already submitted DNA samples for breed specific disease screening, but then there are other things to consider such as undescended testes, the presence of umbilical or inguinal hernias, incorrect bites and the signs of any other breed specific health issues.

Remember:

The perfect animal does not exist. Even the most successful animals within your breed will have a few areas where they could improve. Your goal is to weigh up the merits of each puppy, and decide which attributes you value the most, and which you are prepared to compromise on.

Which is the 'best' puppy?

Although you will have been objectively assessing the merits of each pup, deciding which is the 'best' (or 'pick of the litter') is a little more subjective. The pup you choose will depend on your selection criteria and aspirations. At the end of the day, you should be aiming to keep the healthiest and best conformed puppy in the litter, regardless of sex, colour or markings.

Although there is sometimes a 'stand out' puppy that everyone agrees is the pick puppy, more often than not, you will have a number of pups that excel in certain areas, but who have areas that you might like to improve. Maybe the puppy with the best overall body shape could have a slightly darker eye, or the pup with the strongest hindquarter could have a slightly better coat texture or shoulder placement. It will be up to you to set your priorities and consider what you might need most in your breeding program.

You will then need to consider the homes you have waiting for your pups, and think about which of the remaining pups is 'best' for them. People wanting a family pet or a dog to train for a specific task or activity will have a different set of priorities. They may value temperament and instinct much higher than other attributes.

Your goal is to match each puppy with their new family so that they are a good fit and have the best chances of a long and happy life together.

Time to make decisions

Most puppies will be ready to head off to their new homes from 8 weeks of age. They will have been vaccinated, and health checked at six weeks, and by eight weeks, the vaccine will have provided some temporary immunity. You will have families anxiously waiting to collect their new pet, so you will have to make some decisions.



Litter registration considerations

Although some breeders choose to submit their litter registration paperwork as soon as the pups are microchipped, most will wait until they have allocated pups to their homes. This allows the breeder to assign names to specific pups – such as when a puppy buyer has requested a particular name, or the breeder has a preferred name for the pup that they are keeping for themselves.

As you assess each pup in the litter, you will need to consider not only which home will be the best match for the puppy, but also whether you would like to register the pup on the Main Register or the Limited Register.

Pups registered on the Limited Register are not eligible for conformation showing or breeding. Many breeders choose this type of registration for pups that they feel are not of sufficient merit to be bred in the future.

'Running pups on'

Depending on your location and household, you may be in a position to be able to keep more than one pup, at least in the short term. This means the puppies will have a chance to grow and develop further before you have to decide which will remain with you.

Some breeders choose to do this where they have two pups that are very even, and they cannot decide which to keep, or where they have both a dog and bitch puppy of merit. Running the pups on allows additional time for co-ordination to develop and developmental milestones such as teething to occur. Some breeders will wait until the pups are old enough to undergo testing for breed health issues that cannot be assessed at eight weeks before making a final decision.

If this is the case, you still want to send any other pups to their new homes as close to eight weeks of age as possible. This is an important time for pups to bond with their owners, and the demands of providing adequate socialisation opportunities and training for each puppy individually is too much for one person to do.

By reducing the number of pups, you will also be able to spend more one on one time with the pup or pups that you are likely to keep, preparing them to integrate into your household.

Remember:

If you plan to run on more than one pup, you need to ensure that you do not exceed your permitted number of animals. All pups must be registered with their local council by 12 weeks of age and will count towards your total number of pets.

Tips for assessing your litter

1. Try to remain objective when assessing your pups – you will have your favourites, but if you plan on progressing your breeding program, you have to put that aside and select the puppy that has the best overall merit.
2. No matter how badly you would like a 'red and white boy' or a 'chocolate bitch', you should never limit your choices by selecting a pup using only colour or sex.
3. Although a well constructed pup should move well – don't be fooled by a flashy pup that catches your eye on the move, but who does not have important breed characteristics, or who is not well constructed.
4. Ask your mentor(s) lots of questions. If you are unsure about the terminology they are using, get them to explain clearly what they mean as they examine and discuss each pup.
5. Be very hesitant to keep any pups that have any health or congenital disease issues. Although many of these can be easily repaired (such as small hernias) or may resolve in time (testes which are very late to descend), you are setting yourself up to perpetuate the problem in future litters.
6. Do plenty of reading before assessing your litter. You should know your breed standard backwards and be familiar with the terminology used in it. There are also some fabulous resources available (either online or in books and videos) that can help you with litter assessment techniques.



Although it may be hard to part with them, the reality as a breeder is that once you have selected the one or two pups you plan to keep, you will need to find suitable homes for the rest of your litter.

Your goal will be to find knowledgeable and caring homes where your pups will be valued family members, and where they will receive the required exercise, training and care to have a happy, healthy life.

Plan ahead

Although many long established breeders will have a waiting list for their pups (from previous customers, show exhibitors and other breeders), this is often not the case with newer breeders.

There is also the risk that, regardless of your breed, there will be several litters all whelped about the same time, leading to lots of puppies all being available at the same time as your litter, and only so many suitable homes actively looking for a pup.

With toy and smaller breeds, the expected litter size can be relatively small, so it is usually quite easy to find suitable homes for a few pups. If you have a larger breed or one that regularly has larger litters, you may want to have some interested and suitable homes already lined up before you mate your bitch. It may also pay to find out if other breeders are also planning litters around the same time as yours.

Get the word out early

Many breeders will announce future breeding plans via their website or social media pages even before their bitch has come into season. Because good breeders are always planning a litter or two into the future, this is one way to generate a bit of early interest in a litter. Similarly, it may be possible to share your breeding plans with friends, family and others within your breed in this way – well before the mating takes place.

Some breeders will hold off announcing a litter until the mating has taken place. After all, plans can change, maybe that stud dog you were planning on using is no longer available. Of course, there are no guarantees that your bitch will conceive and, at this stage, you will have no idea of how many pups you might end up with. However, once she is mated, you will have a timeframe of when you expect puppies to arrive, and when they will be ready to head off to their new homes.

Once you have confirmed a pregnancy (and have an idea of how many pups you might expect), you can start making sure that you have suitable homes lined up for your pups. You will want plenty of time to sift through the various enquiries, screen the potential puppy buyers, and make sure that your pups are going to the very best of homes.

Finding suitable homes - where can I advertise?

Important!

There are rules in Victoria that relate to the advertising of pets for sale.

If you plan to advertise an upcoming (but not yet whelped litter), or the fact that you are a breeder, you can do so without restriction.

However, if you are advertising actual pups, you are required by law to provide your Source Number along with the microchip number of the pup or pups you are advertising.

The first place to start advertising may simply be via **word of mouth** – your mentor(s) and the owner of the stud dog can help you spread the news of your litter via their connections. Friends and family can also be a source of potential homes through their wider circle of contacts.

The next place to generate some interest is via your **Breed Club**. Most breed clubs have a designated person who handles enquiries from the public regarding available puppies or litters.

This may be the Club Secretary or a designated 'Puppy Enquiry Officer' so make sure that you contact them and let them know you have a litter on the way or puppies on the ground.

Note: You should also make sure that you let them know when all of your puppies have homes so that they do not keep sending prospective homes your way.

Many breed clubs also have regular newsletters, websites or social media pages where available puppies can be advertised. You will need to contact your breed club to see what they offer, but this is often an excellent place to start. There may be a small fee to advertise, or it might be included in your membership fee. Some clubs offer a 'Breeder Membership' that includes both an ongoing listing on their breeder pages and a set number of puppy or litter adverts each year which may be a better option.

Another good place to advertise your litter is via online pure bred only websites such as [Dogzonline](#). These require that you pay a yearly subscription, but this allows you to list yourself as a breeder and advertise both litters and older pups for sale through their pages. Dogzonline only allows Dogs Australia registered breeders on their site, so you will have to provide your Dogs Victoria membership number to register.

Of course, there are many other places you can advertise. From the local supermarket noticeboard to online listings through places such as Gumtree. Unfortunately, unscrupulous breeders, puppy farmers, and scammers also use some of these places.

Regardless of where you advertise, you will need to meet your requirements under Victorian Law. Many online advertising portals will not allow you to publish an advert without all of the correct details. If you are advertising elsewhere, make sure that you always provide both your Source Number and the Microchip Numbers of the pups you plan to sell.

If you are advertising pups for sale, Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.26 also requires that you provide your Dogs Victoria membership number and the text:

'Please contact Dogs Victoria on email: office@dogsvictoria.org.au to verify my membership.'

Screening potential homes

Regardless of where the enquiry comes from, you will want to screen all potential homes to make sure they are suitable and can provide the right kind of home for one of your pups. You want to make sure that the person making the enquiry is fully aware of the amount of time, effort and cost involved in caring for and living with a pet. You also want to make sure that they have selected a breed that is truly suitable for their lifestyle and experience.

Sometimes people are drawn to the look of a breed, or have seen it in movies or television and do not have a realistic idea of the commitment required. You don't want any of your puppies going to a home where their needs are unlikely to be met, or the novelty will fade as the pup grows out of the cute and cuddly phase and becomes a typical 'teenager' and starts pushing the boundaries.

As you chat to potential puppy buyers, you will want to get an idea of their level of experience and expectations – do they want a family pet and companion or are they looking for a pup to train for hunting, herding, dog sports or other specific tasks? Do they have young children? Elderly family? Have they owned dogs before? If so, how long ago? And what breed? Do they have a definite preference for their puppy – male or female, or a specific colour? What sort of temperament do they think they would like – spirited and lively, calm and sedate, affectionate or a little aloof?

All of this information will give you a good idea of the type of home the family can offer and will give you a 'gut feel' about their suitability. Many breeders will tell you that they have had conversations with potential puppy buyers, and have immediately decided that that person would NOT be getting one of their pups. Others have spent ages educating the prospective puppy buyers about the breed, to have the people realise that the breed might not be for them.

If you are breeding a breed that is relatively common or 'popular', you will usually find that you have more enquiries than puppies – this gives you the luxury of being able to pick and choose the best homes. The downside of this is that you are also likely to get many enquiries from people who are not at all suitable, but who have been drawn to the breed simply because of its popularity.

If you have a lesser known breed or a rare breed, you may find that you have a lot fewer enquiries, but that the quality of the potential home is a bit higher. These are generally people who have either had the breed before (so know exactly what the breed requires, how large it will be and the time required for coat care and training) or who have spent a lot of time researching the right breed for them.

You will still have to spend time chatting to them, and in some cases, they really should meet some adults of the breed first (if they have not seen one) to make sure that they are prepared for what their cute puppy will grow into.

In most cases, where possible, you will want to meet the potential puppy buyers in person, before agreeing to sell them a puppy. You want to feel sure that they will provide a fabulous, loving home, and are as keen as you to ensure that any puppy that leaves your home has a long, healthy and happy life.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.20

A member shall ensure that persons acquiring dogs from that member understand the requirements for the care, welfare and responsible ownership of the dog, and that they have the time and facilities, e.g. adequate fences, sufficient room and proper shelter, to fulfil their responsibilities.

How many homes do you need?

Until you have your litter safely on the ground, you will not be able to know exactly how many homes you will need. Many potential puppy homes may have specific requirements – maybe they are after a male puppy, and are not interested in a female or vice versa.

Many breeders take 'Expressions of Interest' – this is where they have a list of potential homes ready to go before the litter is born. Each potential home will have indicated their preferences such as colour or sex, and there will be a priority based on what type of home is being offered and the person's relationship to you.

For example: You would like to keep the pick puppy. You have an enquiry for a puppy to show from another breeder so they will be assigned the second pick because you want the best pups representing your kennel and your breeding. Your aunt would like a pup so she will be the next in line. Then there are three homes wanting a male puppy, and two homes wanting a female, one of which wants a specific colour girl.

As you can see, you may not be able to fill everybody's requests – maybe your litter only ends up having one male pup, or there is only one girl of the specific colour requested, and it turns out to be the pick puppy, and you keep it yourself. Maybe you end up with only two or three pups in the litter, or there are not two 'show quality' pups in the litter, and the other breeder decides not to take one. There are many potential outcomes.

Remember:

Even if you do have interest from suitable homes before you have a litter on the ground, you must be prepared for things to change prior to your litter being born, and for potential homes to drop off your list.

Often families looking for a pup put their name down with several breeders (especially if litters are scarce) and may have already found their perfect pup before your bitch whelps. If families have expressed interest prior to your bitch whelping, make sure that you follow up with them as soon as you know how many pups you have.

Once your litter is born, you can loosely assign puppies to homes, and let any potential puppy buyers know whether or not you are likely to have something for them. If you do not have the colour or gender of pup they expressed interest in you can ask if they would be interested in an alternate, or whether they would rather wait for another litter.

It is important if you plan to keep a pup from the litter yourself, that you do not promise specific pups to homes too early. You want to be keeping the best puppy for yourself – regardless of whether your plans are for showing, breeding or a specific dog sport.

Your communication skills will be critical. You need to be very clear about the order in which pups will be assigned, and remind your potential puppy buyers that you will have the first selection – even if that is not until the evaluation at eight weeks of age.

Taking deposits

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take a 'deposit' for a puppy once you have your litter on the ground. Many breeders see a deposit as a way to establish some commitment from the purchaser, and to discourage those people who may 'pull out' at the last minute, well after you have turned away other potential homes.

The taking of deposits is an area where there are a great diversity of opinions. Some breeders insist on a deposit once the pups are born because they have been caught out before with purchasers changing their mind or obtaining a pup from another breeder at the last minute. They feel that the deposit provides them with some added security about the intention of the purchasers, and discourages the purchasers from shopping around for a pup, or backing out of the deal.

Other breeders refuse to take deposits. They don't want to have families whose circumstances have changed, feeling forced to take a puppy rather than risk losing their deposit, and they don't want to promise anyone a puppy before they have had a chance to fully assess their litter.

If you do decide that you want to take a deposit, you need to be aware that this constitutes a legal agreement between both parties – they are committing to purchasing a puppy from you, and you are committing to provide them with a suitable puppy.

You need to be very clear about whether or not the deposit is refundable, and if it is, under what circumstances. Does the deposit amount constitute a partial payment for a puppy, and if so, what percentage of the total cost of the puppy?

The terms of the deposit need to be very clearly outlined, documented, and both parties need to sign, indicating they are happy with the terms and conditions BEFORE any money changes hands.

Important!

Dogs Victoria does not get involved in disputes relating to deposits as these are private commercial agreements.

You should seek legal advice regarding what is considered fair and reasonable, what is enforceable under Victorian law, and what the implications would be should things go wrong before you draft any deposit related agreements.



Purebred, pedigree dogs have a long recorded ancestry going back to when their breeds were first developed, and the Stud Books began recording parentage.

One of the things that will set your puppies apart from those of other dog breeders will be the ability to provide each owner with an official Dogs Australia Pedigree Certificate (often referred to as 'papers') identifying their pup and its heritage, and confirming its place on the pedigree register.

The rules relating to the registration of dogs on the national pedigree database form 'Part 6' of the Dogs Australia Regulations and 'Part 4' of the Dogs Victoria Regulations.

It is the breeder's responsibility to submit all the required paperwork for litter registration, so it is important that you understand what you need to do.

First things first

For a litter to be eligible for registration, both the mother and the father of the litter must be of the same breed and/or variety. Both must be registered on the Main Register (Blue papers).

Where there are mandatory health clearances required for the breed (Dogs Australia Litter Registration Limitations), both parents must have been tested. Results of these tests (showing the individual's microchip number) will need to be submitted with the Litter Registration paperwork.

ALL of the owners of BOTH the mother and the father must be financial members of a Dogs Australia state body (or equivalent), and the breeder of the litter must hold a valid Breeder's Prefix.

The mother of the litter must be registered in the breeder's name.

When should litter registration occur?

Dogs Victoria Regulation 4.1.3.1.3

Registration should be applied for within three (3) calendar months of the date of whelping.

Application for registration of a litter cannot take place until all of the pups in the litter have been individually identified with a microchip.

For most puppies, the implanting of a microchip occurs at the 6 week veterinary health check and vaccination visit. However, sometimes pups within a litter are microchipped earlier than this to facilitate early health testing or DNA screening for known breed health issues.

Although registration can occur as soon as the pups have been chipped, most breeders like to wait until they have had the opportunity to evaluate the litter and decide whether or not some of the pups will be registered on the Limited Register rather than the Main Register, and which pups they may consider keeping for themselves.

This may mean that the litter registration is not submitted until after the 8 week evaluation. By then, you will have begun allocating puppies, and they will be ready to leave for their new homes. This also means that you can assign any favoured names to the correct pups.

Submitting the litter registration at this time may mean that you may not have the individual pedigree papers to hand to the new owners when they collect their pups, but they should not have to wait very long.

How long does it take for litter registrations to be processed?

The litter registration process is relatively quick, **providing** all of the required information and documentation is submitted, and the Litter Registration Form or Online Litter Registration process is completed correctly.

Generally speaking, online applications are usually processed faster than hard copy applications as there are less opportunities for errors, no mailing delays, and payment is processed immediately.

How do I apply?

Breeders have two options to complete their litter registration - **manually** using a hardcopy form, or **online** through the [Showmanager](#) platform.

Breeder members who regularly exhibit or compete with their dogs will already have a Showmanager account that they use for online entries, but if you don't have one, it is free to register.

Moving forward, breeders are being encouraged to use the online application process as it reduces mistakes and speeds up the registration process.

Both methods of registration require the submission of supporting documentation, so you need to make sure that you have everything prepared and completed before you apply.

Completing your Litter Registration correctly

Regardless of whether you choose to complete your litter registration online, or in hardcopy, the required information and rules that apply are the same.

Taking time to make sure that you have filled in every section and ensuring you have all of the required signatures and supporting documents means that your litter registration can be processed without delays.

Breeder and Breed details

You will need a valid Breeder Prefix and you need to enter the membership number associated with that prefix. You will also have to indicate the breed of the litter that you wish to register.

Note:

You should list the breed exactly as it appears on the Dogs Australia Breed listing – check your bitch's Pedigree Certificate if you are not sure.

Sire and dam details

You will need to provide the details of the parents of your litter and the date(s) of service (when the mating or matings took place) along with the date the puppies were whelped.

For both the Sire and the Dam, you will need to list their full registered name and registration number as they appear on their Pedigree Certificates. You cannot use pet names, and you do not need to list any titles (either before or after the registered name) as these will already be in the national database, and will be added automatically when the registration papers are printed.

Note:

The registered name provided MUST match the registration number.

When the litter information is entered into the system, a validation process occurs, ensuring that the service and whelping dates reflect the expected length of the canine pregnancy. If the time between the two dates is not correct, the registration will be flagged as incorrect.

Signed declaration from the registered owners of both parents

As the breeder of the litter, you are required to sign a declaration stating that the information supplied is true and correct, that the litter was whelped in Victoria, and that each puppy's colour description conforms to the Dogs Australia breed standard accepted/allowed colours for the breed.

The owner of the Sire (or the Semen in the case of a frozen semen mating) must also sign a declaration. The Sire declaration states that the service or insemination did occur on the dates listed on the form, that the Sire is entire and has two normal testicles descended into the scrotum.

Note:

If you are also the stud dog's owner, you will sign as BOTH the breeder of the litter and the owner of the Sire.

Both of these declarations state that the person or persons signing understand that making a false declaration is punishable under state laws.

If you are doing your litter registration online, you will need to have everyone sign the '[Sire Certification form](#)', if you are applying in hardcopy, everyone must sign the [Litter Registration Form](#).

Important!

One of the most common reasons for delaying the processing of a Litter Registration is where signatures are missing from the form.

Before submitting your Litter Registration, you need to double check the form is signed by both you AND the owner of the sire and, where the sire (or the dam) is in joint names or syndicated ownership, that ALL owners have signed the form.

It is strongly recommended that you ask the Sire Owner(s) to sign the Litter Registration form **AT THE TIME OF THE SERVICE**.

However, they **MUST** sign the Stud Dog Declaration as soon as the agreed conditions (such as payment of a stud fee) are met.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 4.1.3.16

The service declaration on the Litter Registration application form is to be signed by the owner/s of the sire/ semen and provided to the registered owner of the bitch immediately upon satisfaction on the agreed conditions of use of the sire/semen. The signed Litter Registration application form is to be held by the registered owner of the bitch pending registration of the litter.

If your litter was the result of a frozen semen insemination, you will need to attach a '[Use of Frozen Semen](#)' form signed by the implanting veterinarian, as well as have the owner of the Semen complete the declaration.

Frozen semen needs to be registered on the Dogs Australia database before it can be allocated to a litter registration. Ideally, this semen registration will have been completed well ahead of time, especially if you have used semen from an overseas dog as the registration process is a little more complicated.

If the frozen semen has not yet been registered, the registration paperwork can be submitted at the same time as the litter, but the litter registration may be delayed.

Individual puppy details

Next you will complete details of each puppy whelped in the litter.

All puppies that are still living at the time of registration must be included – you cannot choose to register one or two pups from a litter and not the others. All of the pups must be registered at the same time - you cannot submit another request for registration at a later date.

Your breeder prefix will form the first part of each puppy's name, but you will need to select a name for each puppy. Names (including the breeder prefix) have a limit of 30 characters including spaces.

Important!

Before selecting names for your puppies, you should read the rules that relate to naming. These are found in the Dogs Australia Regulations Part 6 – Section 6.1 and the Dogs Victoria Regulations Part 4.1.3.

Because there are quite a few rules surrounding appropriate and eligible names, you are also asked to provide a second choice name for each puppy if the first is not deemed suitable. If you do not provide an alternate name, the regulations allow for the pups to be named by the Chief Executive.

You must indicate the sex of each puppy, and provide the microchip number for that puppy. If completing your litter registration online you will need to do this via the '[Microchip Certification Form](#)' which needs to be signed by your veterinarian at the time of chipping. If you are applying using the hardcopy form you will need to attach the microchip barcode stickers directly to the form.

Note:

Handwritten microchip numbers are not acceptable. The original barcode stickers are required.

For each puppy, you need to indicate their colour, and it is important that you only use the colours and colour terminology allowed and described in the Dogs Australia Breed Standard for your breed.

Incorrect or missing colours will mean that your litter registration is delayed, and in some cases force your pups to be registered on the Limited Register.

Finally, you need to indicate for each puppy whether you are registering it on the Main Register, or the Limited Register.

Main Register puppies have the ability to compete in all disciplines and to be used for the purposes of breeding. Limited Register puppies cannot be used for breeding and cannot compete in Conformation shows. Limited Register papers are orange in colour rather than blue.

Many breeders use the Limited Register for puppies that are going to pet homes where they will be desexed, or where the puppy has one or more faults that the breeder feels makes it unsuitable for breeding.

You will notice that next to each puppy on the Litter Registration Form, there is the option to also request a Dogs Victoria Puppy Pack – this consists of a variety of information pamphlets and brochures, along with information about becoming a member.

Puppy packs are free to breeders, but there is a small fee to cover postage. Please refer to the most current [Schedule of Fees](#) for all of the costs associated with litter registration.

DNA Parentage Verification Results

For all litters whelped from 1 January 2026, there will be a requirement to provide DNA parentage results for each puppy in the litter.

The DNA parentage verification compares the DNA markers found in the puppies with the DNA markers in the nominated parents to ensure that the Sire and Dam recorded on the pedigree are correct.

Both parents will need to have a DNA Profile recorded, and you will be required to submit a DNA swab from each puppy so their DNA profiles can be compared. The DNA laboratory/provider that you choose will then produce a verification certificate that you will need to include with your litter registration.

If you are completing your litter registration online, there may be an option to digitally 'share' results directly from the DNA provider laboratory or you can upload a certificate.

Dogs Australia Litter Registration Limitations

There are a number of breeds who are subject to national Litter Registration Limitations (or LRL's).

Dogs Australia defines a Litter Registration Limitation as:

"..... mandatory requirements that are applied to the sire and dam of a litter of puppies prior to being able to register that litter. The "limitation" is some form of disease screening process that has been voted on and agreed to by the particular breed community, through the input of registered owners and/or breeders, State Breed Clubs and National Breed Councils."

A list of breeds with Litter Registration Limitations can be found in the [Dogs Australia Regulations Part 6-Section 8](#) and currently affect the following breeds:

Bedlington Terrier	Australian Shepherd
Flat Coated Retriever	German Shepherd Dog
Golden Retriever	Bullmastiff
Labrador Retriever	Dobermann
Afghan Hound	Rottweiler

If you are registering a litter of pups of one of these breeds, you will also need to submit proof that the parents of the litter have met the testing requirements outlined in the Dogs Australia regulations. Any test results should clearly show the name of the animal tested and their unique 15 digit microchip number.

Completing your litter registration ONLINE

To complete your litter registration online, you will need to have a Showmanager account. If you do not have one, you can register for one **free** at <https://showmanager.com.au/Account/Register>.

Showmanager also has a paid 'Premium' account option, but **you do not need this** to register a litter.

Dogs Victoria has a 'How To' manual that you can download from the breeder resources page of the website that will take you through all of the steps of registering a litter online.

To add a litter, from the menu click on 'My Area' and scroll down and select 'My Litters'. The 'My Litters' page will show any litters you have created previously, but for first time breeders it will be an empty table.

Click on the green 'Add a New Litter' button to start the process. Next select 'Dogs Victoria' which will take you to the screen where you can begin to enter the details of your litter.

ADD NEW LITTER +

You will need to work your way down and fill in each field on the Litter Details page. You have the option to provide a 'friendly name' for the litter - such as 'Toffee's litter' or 'Rex and Apple 2026' so that it is easier for you to find in your 'My Litters' list in future.

The online system automatically imports some details - such as the 'Breeder details' paired to your membership/prefix and allows you to select a Sire or Dam from your list of dogs if you already have existing dog profiles of the same breed.

Once you have filled in all of the required details on the first page, you will need to hit the 'Save and Add Puppies' button to move to the next step.

Here you will enter the details for each puppy, including first and second choice names, colours, and whether you would like the puppy registered on the Main or Limited Register.

At the bottom of the page you have the option to upload the Puppy's DNA Parentage Result, and indicate whether you would like a Dogs Victoria Puppy Pack (full of information for the new owner).

Important!

ALL Online Litter Registrations require that you upload:

- » a [Microchipping Certification Form](#) signed by your veterinarian
- » a [Sire Certification Form](#) which must be signed by ALL owners of the Sire and Dam (unless the ownership of the Sire is identical to the Dam)

You may also need to upload other supporting documents such as Artificial Insemination forms, Export Pedigree Application forms, Natural Bob Tail letters, and certificates required by any Litter Registration Limitations for your breed.

Once you have completed all of the requirements, and uploaded all of your supporting documentation, you will hit the button to send it to Dogs Victoria.

The Showmanager system will calculate the payment amount based on the current Schedule of Fees, and you can select to pay by Credit Card or Direct Deposit.

Completing your litter registration HARDCOPY

If submitting your litter registration in hardcopy, you will need to use the ['Application for Litter Registration'](#) form.

The hardcopy 'Application for Litter Registration' form, like the online registration program, is designed to capture all of the requirements outlined in the regulations.

The form can be completed manually (handwritten) or there is a digital PDF version that can be completed by typing into the required fields on your computer. You can then save the filled in form and either print it out or email it.

Microchip stickers (not handwritten numbers) need to be attached to the hardcopy form, so in most cases you will need to print out your filled in form and attach them, or include a copy of the microchip certification form filled out by your veterinarian at the time the pups were chipped.

The hardcopy form has a handy checklist to help breeders make sure they have correctly completed the form and attached all of the required supporting documentation. You should take your time filling it out and run through every item on the checklist before sending it in.

The completed form, supporting documentation, and the required fee are then submitted to Dogs Victoria for processing.

Litter Registration Success

Once you have submitted all of the required information and paid your fee, your application will be reviewed by Dogs Victoria staff and then added to the National Pedigree Database.

The online litter registration process through Showmanager will send you automated emails notifying you of the application's progress and when it is complete.

Either way, once the litter is registered, you will receive a pedigree certificate for each of your puppies showing their registration number, name and details.

Make sure that you keep a copy of each puppy's papers in your litter records after you give them to the new owner!

DV Breeder Series Preparing for your puppies to head off to their new homes

The time is fast approaching for your puppies to head off to their new homes. They have had their first vaccination, they are microchipped, and you have registered them with Dogs Victoria. It is time to prepare everything in readiness for their departure.

Important!

Under both the Victorian Government's rules and the Dogs Victoria Regulations, pups must not head off to their new homes prior to 8 weeks of age.

If any of your pups are headed to homes overseas, they cannot travel until they are at least 12 weeks and sometimes older, depending on the requirements of the country of import.

Preparing the required documentation

There is quite a bit of documentation and information that you are required to provide to each person taking ownership of one of your puppies. Most breeders find it easiest to prepare a file or folder for each pup so that all of the documents including certificates, contracts, registration papers and other information, are all in one place.

You can include anything you feel is relevant in your puppy information pack, but the minimum outlined in the Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.23 requires:

A member shall provide to all recipients of dogs sold or otherwise disposed of by that member, written details of:

- » *The breed characteristics;*
- » *Vaccination record and / or requirements including the due date of the next vaccination or recommended timing for next titre;*
- » *Responsible dog ownership information;*
- » *All documentation required by Dogs Victoria*
- » *Records on internal and external parasite control;*
- » *Records of microchip number with a signed transfer of owner form;*
- » *A desexing certificate (if applicable); and*
- » *A written health declaration in accordance with 20.1.25.*

Important!

*Even though you will be providing the new owners with their puppy's paperwork, **you should keep a copy** of all important documents such as pedigree papers, vaccination cards, veterinary health certificates, microchipping records and health testing results and file these in your litter records.*

Although a lot of the required documentation is certificates and health records, you also want your puppy owners to have a resource that will answer many of their questions about owning and raising a healthy, happy puppy.

There needs to be information on feeding, exercise, grooming, housing, and the importance of training and socialisation.

You should include information on preventative health care – vaccination, worming and parasite control – as well as information on common breed health problems they might encounter during their dog's lifetime.

The Responsible Pet Ownership section needs to include information about local council registration requirements, community expectations and legislation. Dogs Victoria has a fact sheet on [Responsible Dog Ownership](#) and a [New Puppy Owner Guide](#) booklet that might be useful to include, and there is plenty of information available on the [Animal Welfare Victoria](#) website.

Many breeders also choose to include photos and information about the parents of the litter, copies of the results of the parent's health clearances, and photos of the pups as they have grown.

You may also want to include information about your breed's affiliated Breed Club and how to become a member. If your breed club offers a 'Breeder Joined' membership option, you may choose to sign up your puppy purchasers so that they can receive the club newsletter and attend breed club events for the first year.

Important!

Many breeders choose to provide a lot of the general written information a week or two before the pups are due to leave for their new homes. This gives the new owners time to read it without the distraction of an adorable new puppy, and whilst they are very highly motivated to read everything. Having access to the information early helps them be properly prepared when the time comes to bring their new puppy home.



DV Breeder Series Preparing for your puppies to head off to their new homes

Health declaration

The idea of a 'Breeder Health Declaration' is to have full disclosure of any identified health issues at the time of sale so that the new owner is made aware of them. The new owner then has to sign off that they understand how these issues may affect the dog's health and welfare in the future before they agree to take the puppy home.

*The information to be included in the 'written health declaration' is covered in **Regulation 20.1.25**:*

A member shall ensure that all dogs sold or disposed of by that member are in the best possible state of health.

Where any known physical abnormalities exist, a breeder health declaration shall be supplied which includes details of the known physical abnormality at the time of sale and how that abnormality may affect future health and welfare of the dog. This shall be signed in acknowledgement by the recipient.

Regardless of the health status of each puppy, it is a good idea to provide a health declaration as part of your normal puppy sale documentation. To assist breeders, Dogs Victoria has a [template Breeder Health Declaration form](#) that you can use to meet this requirement.

The health declaration may cover off on things such as pups who have an irregular or abnormal bite, have an umbilical or inguinal hernia, or where a male puppy does not have two fully descended testes at the time of sale. It may cover off on pups who have sustained an injury prior to sale, or who have been born with a congenital defect.

Your veterinarian may have identified issues at your puppy's 6 week health check and vaccination visit. These should have been noted on the [Puppy Health Check](#) Veterinary Certificate (which you will supply to the new owner in the puppy information pack), but you still need to provide a health declaration at the time of sale.

Important!

Your veterinarian is the best source of accurate advice in regards to you providing information to potential puppy owners as to how any defects may affect the future health and welfare of the pup. Make sure that you discuss any issues with them so that you can complete your health declaration correctly.

Contract of sale

Most breeders also choose to have a formal contract of sale document. The contract of sale document is signed by both the breeder and the new pet owner and clearly outlines the terms of the sale.

Most contracts of sale provide details of the puppy (name, microchip, registration type etc.) as well as outlining what is and is not included in the purchase price. There may also be details of any restrictions that you may have set on the puppy (i.e. 'not to be bred', 'not to be on sold', 'Limited Register registration' etc.), and rules relating to what should happen if the owners can no longer care for their pup.

Important!

Dogs Victoria has model [Agreements of Sale](#) available on the [Breeder Resources](#) page of the website for breeders to use, and some clubs have developed contracts of sale for their members. You might also want to ask your mentors what they include in their puppy sale contracts.

Where the pup is being sold on 'breeder's terms' (where the breeder enters into an agreement with the new owner to still have breeding access/rights over the animal), there needs to be a clear description of the obligations for both parties, and a documented timeline for events to occur.

Sale guarantee

It is a requirement that you offer your puppy purchasers a 'sale guarantee'. This outlines what occurs if the puppy becomes unwell or ill in the immediate post purchase period or if there are health issues detected that will impact the animal's health and welfare that have not been disclosed in the Breeder Health Declaration.



DV Breeder Series Preparing for your puppies to head off to their new homes

Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.25 outlines the minimum standards in relation to sale guarantees:

With the exception of matters disclosed in the health declaration, a member shall abide by the following as a minimum practice when selling dogs;

- Where a dog is returned to the member within 3 days of sale, for any reason not supported by a statement from a veterinary practitioner, the member must take back the animal and refund 75% of the purchase price.*
- Where a dog is returned to the member within 21 days of sale accompanied by a statement from a veterinary practitioner that the animal is unacceptable for health reasons, the member must take back the animal and refund 100% of the purchase price.*
- If an animal is diagnosed with, suffering from, dies of, or is euthanased from a physical defect or disease that is directly traceable to the point of sale within 3 years of purchase, the member must, subject to a second veterinary opinion, refund 100% of the purchase price where the owner of the animal provides supporting statements from a veterinary practitioner, including test results where a suitable test is available.*
- Owners of the animal must make veterinary reports and test results available to the breeder for the breeder to obtain their own veterinary advice (second opinion), and for the purpose of informing future breeding management.*

Most breeders add a clause to their contract of sale that insists that the new owner have the puppy checked by their own veterinarian within a specified time – usually within a week of purchase. This ensures that the new owner develops a relationship with their veterinarian and provides independent confirmation of the puppy's health status.

You might also want to consider outlining the details of what should happen should the puppy require emergency treatment within the sale guarantee period. At the very minimum, there should be a clause requiring the new owners to contact you as soon as the puppy becomes unwell and to keep you informed and updated as veterinary care is sought.

Other items to consider including in your puppy packs

There are several other items that you may consider including in your puppy packs. What you decide to include is up to you, but you may be able to further assist your puppies have a smooth transition and help your new owners get off to a great start.

Food

Most breeders will include some food for the puppy so that there are no sudden changes in diet at the same time as the stresses of moving to a new home. By providing enough food for at least three or four days, the new owners can gradually change the pup's diet (if they choose) whilst reducing the risk of tummy upsets.

Many of the larger pet food companies offer 'puppy packs' that breeders can order once they have a litter. These are often provided free of charge to breeders and can be a great way to provide some additional 'goodies' and samples of the food you may have been feeding when your puppies head off to their new home. Of course, these puppy packs are also designed to promote brand loyalty, so there are usually some 'extras' the owners can access by providing their details or signing up.

Scented items

As the puppies will be moving away from their mother and littermates, some breeders like to include an item that has been in with the litter so that it carries a familiar scent. This may be a toy, blanket or another soft item that will hold scent well.

Puppy-safe toys

There are many types of dog toys on the market, and new owners are often overwhelmed by the selection. Choosing toys that are safe and appropriately sized for puppies can be confusing. Helping direct your puppy people to toys suitable for chewing or teething puppies, daily enrichment activities, or interactive play can be a great relationship builder.

Maybe in your puppy information, you mention the use of food releasing toys as a way to entertain pups, as an enrichment activity or to slow their eating – why not include a puppy sized version in your puppy pack along with instructions on how they are used. This way, you are setting the new owners up for success right from the start!

Collars and leads

Another item you might want to include is a puppy sized collar and lead. Although many owners will have already been out shopping for collars, they may not have the right sized equipment when they come to collect their pup. By providing a collar or lead, you make sure that if they have to stop on the way home to toilet the pup, they will have something to use to make sure the puppy does not accidentally escape.

DV Breeder Series Preparing for your puppies to head off to their new homes

Pet insurance

Many breeders make use of introductory pet insurance offers as part of their puppy pack offering. Pet Insurance companies will often offer breeders a program where all new puppy owners are entitled to a period of free cover – generally around three months – if the breeder refers them and provides their details.

Loan of items

Depending on your situation and location, you may also choose to loan your new puppy owners items that may help manage their new puppy in the first week or so.

Probably the most commonly loaned item is a pen or crate. This may simply be to assist in getting the puppy home safely if they arrive without a suitable car restraint, but can also assist with toilet training or confinement when the puppy cannot be directly supervised. Once the new owners see the value of the item, they may choose to purchase their own equipment, or arrange a more permanent set up of their own.

Grooming equipment and information

If you have a breed that requires specific grooming tools, sometimes it is best to provide an example of these in your puppy pack, or at least provide information about where the new owner could source the items. The brushes and combs sold in pet stores are often not suitable for certain kinds of coat, and many are of poor quality.

If yours is a breed that requires regular clipping, you may also want to include information about finding a good groomer, the type/style of haircut to ask for, and pictures of the breed (both adults and puppies) trimmed and not trimmed.

Some breeders also include links to other grooming resources such as Youtube videos showing how to bath, dry, comb and brush the breed correctly.

Follow up and ongoing support

You are going to be anxious that your puppies transition into their new homes smoothly. Most new owners will be quick to call for advice, and many will send photos and updates regularly during those first few months.

Some new owners, especially first time pet owners, will take up a lot of your time in those first few weeks with seemingly endless questions and stories, but this usually means that they really want to get everything right and don't want to make any mistakes.

Most breeders will schedule a follow up call about 24 to 48 hours after the puppy heads to its new home. This gives the new owner a chance to ask any questions, and give you some reassurance that the puppy is settling in well. This should be followed up with reminders about worming, vaccinating, and even desexing when these become due.

As a breeder registered with Dogs Victoria, you are expected to provide ongoing support for every puppy you breed throughout their lifetime. This is something that sets Dogs Victoria breeders apart from other breeders whose input often ceases as soon as the money from the sale hits their bank account.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.21

A breeder shall be expected to maintain reasonable contact with the purchasers of dogs from that breeder and to offer continued advice and reasonable assistance.

Breeding is hard work, and saying goodbye to puppies that you have raised can be very emotional. Hopefully, you have chosen homes that will love and care for your puppies as you do, and your puppies will go on to bring untold joy and happiness to their new families.

Most experienced breeders will tell you they have made life long friends with some of their puppy purchasers. Others will tell you they are still receiving Christmas cards and birthday updates from pups that they bred 10 or even 15 years ago!

This is one of the things that makes breeding dogs so worthwhile...





DOGS
VICTORIA
YOUR CANINE COMMUNITY

Appendix

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Dogs Victoria members are governed by our Constitution, Rules, Regulations, Codes, Policies, and Procedures.

Members should be aware of which elements apply to all members and which apply specifically to certain activities.

For ease of reference, this appendix includes an extract of the Regulations relevant to **breeding members and breeding**.

The Dogs Victoria Regulations are regularly amended by the Management Committee. Changes are announced in the monthly Gazette and updated on the [Dogs Victoria website](#), so members should always check the website for the latest version.

Please note: This extract may contain incomplete regulations with only parts of a regulation or selected sub-clauses being included.

To read the regulations in their entirety, please refer to the latest version of the Regulations published on the Dogs Victoria website.

Reminder:

In these regulations 'VCA' or 'Victorian Canine Association' refers to Dogs Victoria and 'ANKC' refers to Dogs Australia.

PART 3 REGULATIONS – GENERAL

3.7. RECOGNITION OF APPROVED AUTHORITY

3.7.7 It shall be a condition of membership that a person, or persons, so authorised by Management Committee may inspect the premises of any member and examine the dogs on the premises at that time.

3.7.7.1 Failure by a member to facilitate an inspection, on the second occasion, by the Field Officer of the member's premises and to examine the dogs without reasonable cause shall result in immediate suspension of the member's privileges until that inspection has taken place. (15/9/25)

PART 4 REGULATIONS - REGISTERS AND REGISTRATIONS

4.1 REGISTERS

4.1.1 Management Committee shall keep and maintain the following Registers.

- » The Main Register
- » The Limited Register
- » The Associate Register
- » Breed Development or other Registers as determined by Management Committee from time to time.

4.1.2 All dogs must be registered with the ANKC or with an ANKC recognised controlling body, and their registered owners financial members of the VCA or of an ANKC recognised controlling body before being eligible for entry for competition or exhibition or participation in any VCA recognised activity.

Members of another ANKC recognised Controlling Body competing in Victoria are bound by the Rules, Regulations, Codes and Policies of the VCA.

4.1.2.1 A member of Dogs Victoria shall not register a dog with a Registry Body not recognised by ANKC Ltd (unless an exemption is granted by Dogs Victoria). (15/11/17)

4.1.3 REGISTRATIONS

4.1.3.1 A dog shall not be registered except with the approval of and by direction of Management Committee.

4.1.3.1.1 A member who breeds a litter of dogs, the parents of which are registered or eligible for Main Register ANKC registration, must apply to register such litter. (15/09/19)

4.1.3.1.2 The member shall apply to register all puppies bred by that member that are living at the date of registration at one and the same time. Such registration must include all puppies from the litter on the one litter registration application form. (15/09/19)

4.1.3.1.3 Registration should be applied for within three (3) calendar months of the date of whelping. (15/09/19)

4.1.3.1.4 Registration applied for after three (3) months, but up to and including eighteen (18) months, requires Management Committee approval, and an additional fee may apply. Such approval may be delegated to the **Office Operations Manager**. (15/04/25)

4.1.3.1.5 No registration application will be processed outside eighteen (18) months of the date of whelping. (15/09/19)

4.1.3.1.6 Applications for registration of litters whelped **on or after 1 January 2026** will not be processed until Dogs Victoria has received a DNA Parentage Verification Report that qualifies the puppies as being from the Sire and Dam. This requirement applies to registration applications on both the Main and Limited Registers. (15/04/25)

4.1.3.1.7 The breeder of a litter must ensure that either DNA profiles for both the Sire and Dam are available at the time of mating, or that DNA samples are collected from each parent and submitted for testing no later than the time at which DNA samples from the puppies in that litter are submitted for testing. (15/04/25)

4.1.3.1.8 In line with the Dogs Australia protocols for DNA testing, DNA sample collection for the purposes of parentage verification must be performed by an approved, independent collector. Identification of the dog by microchip or unique tattoo is required and it must be verified by the approved collector at the time of DNA collection and recorded on the appropriate form. (15/04/25)

4.1.3.4 A member shall not be entitled to effect the initial registration of a dog unless that person is the breeder of such dog and is the registered owner of a Prefix and is a resident of the State.

4.1.5.7 No dog shall be registered or litter recorded unless the breeder has registered a stud prefix **prior to undertaking the breeding** and this prefix shall be the only prefix permitted in the full name of the dog. (15/10/21)

4.2 PREFIXES

4.2.1 Management Committee shall keep and maintain a register of prefixes. A prefix registered by a member may only be used in respect of a breed of dog recognised by the ANKC.

4.2.2 A member who wishes to breed must register a Prefix **prior to undertaking a breeding**. (15/10/21)

4.2.3 An application for an initial prefix will not be processed unless the member has been a member of DOGS Victoria or ANKC recognised body for not less than 12 months, and has successfully completed the Breeder Prefix examination. (15/11/11)

4.2.4 In the naming of dogs a prefix shall only be used with the name of dogs bred in Australia.

4.2.5 Management Committee may decline to accept a prefix for registration.

4.2.6 A prefix may not be accepted for registration if it resembles any other prefix, is misleading, is unsuitable or objectionable, or is known or believed to be a prefix or affix registered in a foreign country or is not in accord with ANKC requirements. Any objection to the registration of a prefix must be lodged with the VCA, within 60 days of the publication in the Gazette.

4.2.7 An application to change the ownership of a registered prefix must be approved by Management Committee. The applications shall require the signature of the current registered owner(s), or an acceptable alternative in lieu thereof, and be accompanied by the prescribed fee as published in the VCA Scale of Charges.

4.2.8 The period of registration of a prefix shall be the financial year of the VCA, but the owner of a prefix may make application to the VCA for the renewal of the registration at the time of renewal of membership of the VCA and upon payment of the appropriate fee.

4.2.9 If the registration of a prefix has lapsed the owner of the prefix may apply for re-registration. Such re-registration may be allowed under such terms and conditions as Management Committee determines.

4.2.10 A membership may only register one prefix for a particular breed of dog, but that prefix may be used by the membership for other breeds.

4.2.11 The decision of the ANKC on any matter relating to a prefix shall be binding on the VCA, and on the members thereof.

4.3 BREEDING RECORDS

4.3.1 A member shall keep proper records of their breeding activities and all such records so kept shall be open for inspection by any person authorised by Management Committee. Any such person shall be at liberty to take extracts therefrom.

4.3.2 A member shall, when required by the Management Committee in writing or on the verbal request of a person authorised by the Management Committee, produce any or all breed records to the Management Committee or authorised person.

4.3.3 Failure to allow an inspection of records or to comply with a request to produce breed records shall result in immediate suspension of the member's privileges until that requirement has been complied with.

4.3.4 Any member who fails to keep proper breed records of dog breeding activities or whose records are false, misleading or inaccurate may be called upon to explain such false, misleading or inaccurate records and may be suspended or disqualified or such other penalty as Management Committee may determine.

PART 20 CODES

20.1 CODE OF PRACTICE

Each member, upon being admitted or re-admitted to membership of the Victorian Canine Association Inc. shall be bound by the Victorian Canine Association Inc. (hereinafter 'Dogs Victoria') Code of Practice.

Ethics

20.1.1 A member shall not knowingly or recklessly misrepresent the ANKC or Dogs Victoria.

20.1.2 A member shall not engage in any behaviour that is contrary to the standards accepted by the community.

20.1.3 A member shall display good sportsmanship and conduct at all times so as to reflect credit upon themselves, the ANKC and Dogs Victoria.

20.1.4 Members shall constantly strive to improve their knowledge of their chosen breed or breeds, and their knowledge of the requirements for the care, welfare and betterment of dogs.

20.1.5 Members shall ensure proper care for all dogs under their control, whereby:

20.1.5.1 Food shall be provided in sufficient quantity and nutritional quality; it must be canine appropriate and nutritionally balanced to meet the daily requirements for the condition, activities, age and size of the each dog. All dogs shall have access, in their housing area, at all times, to a sufficient supply of fresh, clean, water daily. Food and water utensils shall be kept clean;

20.1.5.2 Dogs shall be housed in a safe and secure manner

Extract of Dogs Victoria Regulations 15 July 2025

that is suitable for the size and containment requirements of the dog and provides protection from adverse environmental conditions and climatic extremes. Adequate ventilation and sufficient space must be provided for dogs to stand. The flooring area of pens/cages shall not be made from uncovered suspended wire. Each dog older than 16 weeks of age shall have access to a separate bed or sufficient bedding material that all animals can sleep comfortably at the same time;

20.1.5.3 Dog sleeping, housing and exercise areas shall be kept clean and at a good standard of hygiene by cleaning any faeces, wasted food, and soiled bedding daily. Where pens and kennels are cleaning by hosing, material on floors (toys, bedding, food, faeces etc) shall be removed prior. Hard surfaces in pens and kennels should be disinfected weekly or more often if required. Veterinary advice shall be sought for managing the cleaning of premises and management of isolation if a contagious illness occurs in dogs;

20.1.5.4 All dogs of all age and breeding status shall be provided with an appropriate amount of daily exercise, social contact and enrichment suitable to the individual needs of the dog;

20.1.5.5 Where dogs are tethered, they shall be tethered in accordance with the ***Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*** and Regulations. Pregnant bitches of more than 7 weeks gestation, whelping bitches and lactating bitches with puppies shall not be tethered. Puppies under 16 weeks of age shall not be tethered.

20.1.5.6 Dogs shall be transported in a safe and secure manner. Dogs shall not be transported in the boot of a sedan type car. When on the back of a ute or trailer, dogs must be appropriately tethered or caged. Sealed transport containers shall have multiple ventilation holes.

20.1.5.7 Veterinary care is provided as required in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs*. Additional veterinary requirements for breeding dogs is described in Section 20.8 Code of Practice for Breeding Animal Health Management.

20.1.6 A member who leaves a dog owned by them in the care of another person shall remain responsible for that dog.

20.1.7 A member shall take all appropriate lawful measures to assist a dog in distress.

20.1.8 A member shall positively enhance the reputation of dog breeders and owners by ensuring that dogs owned by the member are not a danger or nuisance to the community.

20.1.9 A member shall not participate in nor support any activity in that involves cruelty or damage to animals, excluding legal hunting activities.

20.1.9.1 Dogs shall not be trained or worked beyond their willingness and capabilities. All training methods used shall be humane and not cause undue fear, distress or pain.

20.1.9.2 Dog Collars

The use of dog collars incorporating protrusions designed to puncture or bruise the dog's skin, or electronic collars designed to deliver an electric shock to the dog is prohibited at any VCA sanctioned event, training activities, or any activity which may reasonably be seen to be in connection with the VCA. (15/09/19)

20.1.10 A member shall make every effort to rehome any dog no longer required by that member to a suitable home. A member shall not dispose of dogs owned or bred by the member to a pound or animal refuge except in exceptional circumstances and following notification in writing to Dogs Victoria. In this instance, depending on circumstances Dogs Victoria may request that any breeder prefix also be suspended or surrendered.

Breeding

20.1.11 A member shall breed primarily for the purpose of improving the quality and / or working ability of the breed in accordance with the breed standard, and not specifically or predominantly for the pet or commercial market.

20.1.11.1 If breeding animals are determined to be no longer suitable for breeding, or are retired and are to be rehomed, they must be prevented from further breeding by transfer to limited register, neutering, contraception, contract of agreement or other means.

20.1.12 A member shall not breed with a bitch unless they have reached adequate maturity for that breed as determined by Dogs Victoria, without the prior approval of Dogs Victoria. Where the Rules, Regulations and Codes of Practice are otherwise silent, the minimum age for breeding a bitch shall be 12 months [see attached Minimum Breeding Age for Bitches]. (15/11/18)

20.1.12.1 The progeny of any matings that are not permitted by 20.1.12 will be registered on the Limited Register and endorsed "never to be upgraded". It will be a breach of Code 20.1.12 by the member/s who are the owners of the sire and dam of the litter constituting an offence against Dogs Victoria Rules, Regulations and Codes. (15/12/24)

20.1.13 A member shall not breed a bitch causing it to whelp more than twice in eighteen months. (15/08/22)

20.1.14 A member shall not breed with a bitch causing it to whelp more than five times in its lifetime (15.03.17)

20.1.14.1 First generation breeding (eg father / daughter; brother / sister; mother / son) matings are not permitted.

20.1.14.2 The progeny of any matings that are not permitted by 20.1.14.1 will be registered on the Limited Register and endorsed "never to be upgraded". It will be a breach of Code 20.1.14 by the member/s who are the owners of the sire and dam of the litter constituting an offence against Dogs Victoria Rules, Regulations and Codes. (15/12/24)

20.1.14.3 All bitches eight years of age and over at the time

of a mating must have a current veterinary certificate stating that the bitch is in good health at the time of breeding. This certificate must be presented at the time of registration of the litter resulting from this mating. A current veterinarian certificate is defined as being within three months prior to the mating. (15/08/15)

20.1.15 No breeding shall take place unless both the dog and bitch are on the Main Register. Dogs and bitches are not permitted to be mated to a dog or bitch of a different breed, to a cross bred dog or bitch, or to an unregistered dog or bitch of the same breed. (15/04/25)

20.1.15.1 A member shall not permit any of that member's unregistered dogs to be mated to any other unregistered dog, with the exception of dogs registered with a Registry Body recognised by ANKC Ltd (unless an exemption is granted by Dogs Victoria). (15.04.18)

20.1.16 A member shall take responsible action to reduce the incidence of hereditary diseases in accordance with the ANKC Code of Practice for Hereditary Diseases and shall comply with Dogs Victoria's Code of Practice for Hereditary Diseases (Code 20.3), and the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986**, particularly with respect to the *Code of Practice for the Responsible Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease*.

20.1.17 A member shall not, within Australia, sell or otherwise transfer from that member's care any puppy under eight [8] weeks of age. (amended 15.05.17)

20.1.18 A member shall not export a puppy under the age of eleven [11] weeks, or such greater age permitted under the livestock import requirements of the country to which the puppy is being exported.

20.1.19 A member shall not knowingly sell a dog to any person residing in an overseas country known to be involved in the utilisation of dogs for the meat trade without first satisfying the VCA that the purchaser is a member of an ANKC recognised canine controlling body in the overseas country. The member and purchaser must acknowledge in writing to the VCA that the intention of the sale is for the improvement of the quality of that breed in the overseas country, and not for any other purpose. (15/03/23)

20.1.20 A member shall ensure that persons acquiring dogs from that member understand the requirements for the care, welfare and responsible ownership of the dog, and that they have the time and facilities, e.g. adequate fences, sufficient room and proper shelter, to fulfil their responsibilities.

20.1.21 A breeder shall be expected to maintain reasonable contact with the purchasers of dogs from that breeder and to offer continued advice and reasonable assistance.

20.1.22 Record keeping requirements:

20.1.22.1 A breeder shall create a record file for each individual puppy born, and maintain until ownership changes or the animal is deceased. A breeder shall make available all records for inspection by an authorised officer or as directed by an officer of Dogs Victoria. Copies of these records must be retained by the breeder for a minimum of 3 five years from date of last entry. (amended 15/09/22)

20.1.22.1.1 Records to be kept for puppies **under** 12 weeks of age shall include the following (copies of original documents are acceptable where originals accompany the puppy to its new owner):

- » a copy of the litter registration form, or alternatively:
 - name,
 - microchip number (when implanted);
 - sex;
 - breed;
 - date of birth;
 - colour and markings (if applicable); and
 - dam and sire registered names and numbers
- » health care history including vaccination records, internal and external parasite control,
- » purchase/disposal record including name and address of new owner (where applicable),
- » copy of health declaration, and
- » record of return (if applicable) with supporting documentation.

20.1.22.1.2 Records to be kept for dogs **over** the age of 12 weeks acquired or retained by breeders for the purpose of breeding shall include:

- » either ANKC registration certificate, or alternatively:
 - registered name and number when registration details become available; (amended 15/09/19)
 - microchip number;
 - sex;
 - breed;
 - date of birth;
 - colour and marking (if applicable); and
 - dam and sire registered name and numbers
- » council registration certificate;
- » health care history including vaccination records or titre tests, internal and external parasite control,
- » breeding status and breeding history,
- » purchase/disposal records including name and address of new owner (where applicable), and
- » record of return (if applicable) with supporting documentation.

20.1.22.2 Records of breeding history for dams must include dates of mating or artificial insemination, dates of whelping, number of puppies born alive, number of puppies stillborn, record of any whelping complications and resultant treatment, microchip numbers for live pups at 8 weeks, and post-partum veterinary treatment.

20.1.23 A member shall provide to all recipients of dogs sold or

otherwise disposed of by that member, written details of:

20.1.23.1 The breed characteristics;

20.1.23.2 Vaccination record and / or requirements including the due date of the next vaccination or recommended timing for next titre;

20.1.23.3 Responsible dog ownership information;

20.1.23.4 All documentation required by Dogs Victoria

20.1.23.5 Records on internal and external parasite control;

20.1.23.6 Records of microchip number with a signed transfer of owner form;

20.1.23.7 A desexing certificate (if applicable); and

20.1.23.8 A written health declaration in accordance with 20.1.25.

20.1.24 A member shall not incorrectly describe nor knowingly misrepresent the characteristics of a breed.

20.1.25 A member shall ensure that all dogs sold or disposed of by that member are in the best possible state of health. Where any known physical abnormalities exist, a breeder health declaration shall be supplied which includes details of the known physical abnormality at the time of sale and how that abnormality may affect future health and welfare of the dog. This shall be signed in acknowledgement by the recipient. With the exception of matters disclosed in the health declaration, a member shall abide by the following as a minimum practice when selling dogs;

20.1.25.1 Where a dog is returned to the member within 3 days of sale, for any reason not supported by a statement from a veterinary practitioner, the member must take back the animal and refund 75% of the purchase price.

20.1.25.2 Where a dog is returned to the member within 21 days of sale accompanied by a statement from a veterinary practitioner that the animal is unacceptable for health reasons, the member must take back the animal and refund 100% of the purchase price.

20.1.25.3 If an animal is diagnosed with, suffering from, dies of, or is euthanased from a physical defect or disease that is directly traceable to the point of sale within 3 years of purchase, the member must, subject to a second veterinary opinion, refund 100% of the purchase price where the owner of the animal provides supporting statements from a veterinary practitioner, including test results where a suitable test is available. Owners of the animal must make veterinary reports and test results available to the breeder for the breeder to obtain their own veterinary advice (second opinion), and for the purpose of informing future breeding management.

20.1.26 A member shall not:

20.1.26.1 Sell or dispose of a dog to a commercial pet wholesaler or retail pet shop.

20.1.26.2 Allow a dog owned by that member to be given as a prize or donation or to be auctioned.

20.1.26.3 Advertise in any media or other display, the sale or disposal of a dog without the inclusion of the member's Dogs Victoria membership number, source number and each dog's full microchip number.

It is mandatory that the following wording is included in any advertisements: *"Please contact Dogs Victoria on email: office@dogsvictoria.org.au to verify my membership"*. (15/08/22)

General

20.1.27 A member who provides or makes available a dog for use in a film, advertisement, promotion, or any media or public display must ensure that:

20.1.27.1 The dog is portrayed in a manner consistent with its breed characteristics and temperament as described in the Standard for that breed; and

20.1.27.2 The dog is presented in a manner that is unlikely to create a negative reaction to dogs generally or that breed in particular and that if there is any likelihood of a negative impression, this is at the same time corrected through the development of a story line that presents the dog or breed in a balanced manner.

20.1.28 A member shall not indulge in false or misleading advertising relating to the conformation, characteristics or performance of that member's dog.

20.1.29 A member shall not misrepresent nor malign the conformation, characteristics or performance of another member's dog.

20.1.30 A member shall not misrepresent, malign, impugn or denigrate another member or person in such a way as to bring discredit upon themselves or Dogs Victoria. (14/02/13)

MINIMUM BREEDING AGE FOR BITCHES

DV Breeder Series

Extract of Dogs Victoria Regulations 15 July 2025

Minimum age at which a Bitch can be **mated**

The age is calculated in the same way as for conformation classes. See also ANKC Regulations Part 5 Section 1 Regulation 1.2 which states:

1.2 To calculate the age of dogs for entry into breed classes where the date of birth does not occur in the relevant month, the anniversary date be taken as the last date of that month, e.g. dogs born on 31 January will be eligible to enter the baby puppy class on 30 April.

Note also ANKC Regulations Part 6 Section 8 Regulation 8.2 which states:

8.2 The minimum breeding age for bitches across all breeds is 12 months at the time of mating. This regulation is not intended to reduce minimum age requirement for breeding set out in the Code of Ethics of Member Bodies and the Rules of National Breed Councils and/or Breed Clubs.

12 Months

All Other Breeds

16 Months

Border Terrier
 French Bulldog

18 Months

Akita Inu
 Alaskan Malamute
 American Staffordshire Terrier
 Australian Kelpie
 Australian Terrier
 Basset Hound
 Beagle
 Bearded Collie (15/02/19)
 Bedlington Terrier
 Border Collie
 Borzoi
 Boston Terrier
 Boxer
 Bullmastiff
 Cane Corso
 Chow Chow
 Curly Coated Retriever
 Dalmatian
 Deerhound
 Dobermann
 Dogue De Bordeaux
 English Setter (15/02/19)
 Finnish Lapphund

Flat Coated Retriever
 German Shepherd Dog (16/10/05)
 German Shorthaired Pointer
 Golden Retriever
 Gordon Setter (15/06/24)
 Griffon Bruxellois
 Hungarian Vizsla
 Irish Setter (15/12/23)
 Keeshond
 Labrador Retriever (01/01/20)
 Miniature Pinscher
 Pekingese
 Pharaoh Hound
 Rhodesian Ridgeback
 Samoyed
 Schipperke
 Schnauzer (Miniature)
 Scottish Terrier
 Shih Tzu
 Staffordshire Bull Terrier
 Weimaraner
 Weimaraner [Longhair]

20 Months

Bernese Mountain Dog
 Mastiff
 Schnauzer (Giant)

22 Months

Anatolian Shepherd Dog
 Leonberger
 Neapolitan Mastiff
 Newfoundland
 Pyrenean Mastiff
 Rottweiler
 Spanish Mastiff
 Tibetan Mastiff

24 Months

Afghan Hound (15/01/24)
 Australian Shepherd
 Azawakh
 Cocker Spaniel [American]
 Great Dane
 Irish Wolfhound
 Lhasa Apso
 Old English Sheepdog
 Pyrenean Mountain Dog
 Russian Black Terrier
 Saluki
 Schnauzer
 St Bernard

20.3 CODE OF PRACTICE FOR HEREDITARY DISEASES

20.3.1 Compliance

This Code of Practice has been developed to conform with the Dogs Victoria Code of Ethics, by which each member is bound and in particular the commitment of members to 'breed only for the purpose of improving the standard of the breed'. (15/08/18)

20.3.2 Practical Application

20.3.2.1 Members will take responsible action to reduce the incidence of hereditary diseases in their breeds.

20.3.2.2 Where there is a control program, approved by Dogs Victoria, covering a breed for a disease known or considered to be inherited, then breeders within the breed should participate and comply with the requirements of the program. (15/08/18)

20.3.2.3 Where a hereditary disease is recognised by the breed club and Dogs Victoria, or Dogs Victoria, to be a problem in a breed, and where there is a suitable screening procedure or test for that disease: - (15.08.18)

20.3.2.3.1 The owner of a stud dog should, before making the dog available for stud duty –

20.3.2.3.2 have a current official evaluation or test result for the dog for such hereditary disease:

20.3.2.3.3 provide the official evaluation or test result to owners of bitches to be mated;

20.3.2.4 The owner of a bitch should, before mating her to a dog –

20.3.2.4.1 have a current official evaluation or test result for the bitch for such hereditary disease;

20.3.2.4.2 provide the official evaluation or test result to the owner of the stud dog;

20.3.2.5 Ensure that the proposed mating fits within the parameters of responsible action as approved by Dogs Victoria to reduce hereditary diseases within the breed.

20.3.2.6 Before any puppy or adult animal is sold, the prospective owners be advised that the seller has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the animal is healthy as stated in the Dogs Victoria Code of Ethics by way of a health declaration in accordance with 20.1.25.

20.3.2.7 If the reason for diagnosis, death, or euthanasia of a dog is a result of a known heritable defect, the parents and any offspring from those parents still held by the breeder must be tested and managed for the heritable defect. Breeder's records must link test results and death certificates with the individual dog's microchip or registration number.

20.8 CODE OF PRACTICE FOR BREEDING ANIMAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT

20.8.1 All breeding dogs must have a general health check by a veterinary practitioner at least once per year, or more frequently as directed by a veterinary practitioner.

20.8.2 All dogs must have a general health check by a veterinary practitioner prior to their first mating. Proof of the health check may be a Veterinary practitioner's certificate, stating that at the time of examination, the dog had no impediments to breeding. This may be undertaken in conjunction with the health check in 20.8.1.

20.8.3 All bitches must have a post-partum health check by a veterinary practitioner.

20.8.4 A breeder shall have a written agreement with one or more veterinary practitioners which describes arrangements for:

- » the use of the veterinary practitioner's facilities for the treatment of animals;
- » the provision of isolation housing if the breeder does not have a separate isolation housing; and the supervision of animals in isolation who remain in the care of the breeder;
- » advice relating to the health management plan for the breeder if Dog's Victoria's Model Health Management Plan for Breeders is not used;
- » providing vaccination certificates for puppies being sold from the breeder;
- » providing veterinary assistance for the breeder and able to provide treatment and/or services to the breeder within 6 hours of notification that veterinary attention is required; and
- » 24 hour contact or treatment or provision of services through an alternative 24 hour or emergency practice.

20.8.5 A breeder shall either:

20.8.5.1 adopt Dogs Victoria's Model Health Management Plan for Breeders, or

20.8.5.2 alternatively develop their own written health management plan that has been formulated and is reviewed annually in consultation with a veterinary practitioner, and meets the requirements for Health Management Plans which are contained within Section 3(5) of the *Victorian Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses (2014)*

DOGS VICTORIA MODEL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Model Health Management Plan will be a separate document, published as a template for members to complete and is referred to by our Code of Practice in section 20.8.5. It is therefore expected that once complete, members will follow the content of the plan, or develop their own which meets the requirements in 20.8.5.1. Members will be required to produce their plan on request of Dogs Victoria and compliance may be inspected by Dogs Victoria Field Officers. The Model Health Management Plan will be developed by a working party including veterinary practitioner[s].

The Model Health Management Plan is expected to include protocols for:

- » grooming requirements
- » exercise, environmental enrichment and socialisation programs
- » behavioural and welfare assessment of dogs
- » assessment programs for the health and welfare of dogs being reared for sale or as breeding dogs
- » assessment for admission of new breeding dogs
- » processes for determining the suitability of breeding dogs to continue breeding
- » processes for long term management, desexing and/or assessing suitability for rehoming of retired breeding dogs
- » whelping protocols
- » health assessment for puppies
- » vaccination and/or titre testing protocols, internal and external parasite prevention programs consistent with Dogs Vic's position on these (below)
- » response to a general outbreak of disease
- » protocols for quarantine and movement of dogs, including new animals introduced
- » management of isolation facilities (where isolation facilities are constructed at the breeder's premises)
- » consideration of an appropriate response to foreseeable emergencies for both humans and dogs, including evacuation procedures
- » approved methods of euthanasia for emergency situations consistent with Dogs Vic's position on euthanasia (below)

Position on vaccinations, titre testing, parasite and pest control

Vaccination programs and/or titre testing protocols within the Health Management Plan for all dogs and puppies shall address the Core Vaccines as recommended by the AVA (Canine Distemper; Infectious Canine Hepatitis; Canine Parvovirus) at a frequency determined by the breeder following consideration of the policies of the AVA and WSAVA, or consistent with findings of published and peer reviewed research.

Guidance on this will be provided by Dogs Vic in the Model Plan. Preventative treatment is also recommended for intestinal worms and Heartworm.

Non-core vaccines (Parainfluenza virus, Bordetella bronchiseptica and Leptospira interrogans) are only required by dogs whose geographic location, local environment or lifestyle places them at risk of contracting specific infections.

Every effort should be made to control pests such as fleas and paralysis tick. Preventative treatment for pests should be considered based on risk, geographical location and health risk factors.

Prevention and treatment products should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. Where no prevention or treatment is used in an instance where the Health Management Plan had originally indicated it would be given, a veterinary certificate to that effect containing the veterinary advice given and the breeder's rationale for the different action must be available.

First treatment for worms should not be given before 14 days of age and first vaccination not before 6 weeks of age except on veterinary recommendation. Other preventatives should only be administered to puppies under 8 weeks on veterinary recommendation.

Vaccination certificates, including dates of next vaccine, details of the vaccine required, and a record of who administered the vaccine, must be signed by a veterinary practitioner at each vaccination. Alternatively where titre testing is used in lieu, a copy of the results and recommended date for the next test should be kept on file.

Position on euthanasia

Where euthanasia is necessary, it must be carried out by a veterinary practitioner, except in emergency situations. In the case of emergency, a breeder may only carry out euthanasia under the direction of a veterinary practitioner, using a humane method. In such a situation, the veterinary practitioner must provide the breeder with a certificate stating that the veterinarian gave permission for the euthanasia including time, reason and approved form of euthanasia.

Euthanasia must be performed in an area that is separate from any dog housing areas, out of view of any other animals.

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