

Searching for a Puppy

Starting the Search:

- *Attend an event such as the an all-breed dog show or pet fair and talk to people who own the breed you want.
- *Attend a local dog show. Show catalogs list the names and addresses of the owners of entered dogs. You can also talk to the owners and handlers of the dogs (though not when they're about to go into the ring!) and get some leads that way.
- *Write to the AKC and ask for the names and addresses of breed clubs. These clubs can steer you in the right direction.
- *Learn about your breed before you look to buy one. Read the breed standard, find out about grooming requirements, typical temperaments, health problems that are common in the breed, etc. Irresponsible breeders hate educated buyers!
- *Price alone should not be a factor in deciding what breeder to buy from. While a high price doesn't necessarily guarantee high quality, a very low price often does not turn out to be a bargain in the long run. Find out what typical prices are for show and pet quality puppies of your breed in your area.
- *Be patient. You may have to wait a few months (or longer) to find the right dog from a good breeder. This is a very short time compared with the ten to fifteen years that a dog will live with you.

Responsible Breeders DO:

- *Breed in order to improve the breed and produce the best puppies they possibly can, and usually plan to keep at least one of them.
- *Ask as many questions of you as you do of them.
- *Show evidence of at least two or three years of serious interest in their breed, i.e. dog club memberships (the AKC doesn't count!), show and match ribbons, and Championship and/or performance (obedience, agility, tracking, field, etc.) titles.
- *Breed only dogs that closely match the breed standard and are free of serious health and temperament problems.

- *Tell you if they think you would be better off with another breed of dog, or no dog at all.
- *Provide referrals to other breeders if they don't have anything available.
- *Use a written contract and guarantee, or at least an oral agreement, when selling a dog, with clear terms that you can live with.
- *Provide a registration slip, a pedigree, and up-to-date shots/health records with every puppy they sell.
- *Honestly discuss any special problems/requirements associated with the breed.
- *Offer assistance and advice on grooming, training, etc., for the life of the dog.
- *If, for any reason and at any time, you cannot keep the dog, will take it back.
- *Normally breed only one or two litters a year, max!
- *Have dogs that are clean, healthy, happy, and humanely cared for.

Responsible Breeders DO NOT:

- *Appear overly eager to sell/"get rid of" a puppy
- *Breed simply to produce puppies to sell
- *Breed a bitch on every season, or more than once a year
- *Have breeding stock that consists of a "mated pair"
- *Claim that all of their puppies are "show/breeding quality"
- *Claim that their breed has no problems (some have fewer than others, but every breed has at least a couple)
- *Sell puppies to pet stores or to anyone that they have not met/screened personally
- *Sell puppies that are less than eight to ten weeks old
- *Sell puppies without papers (registration slip and 3-5 generation pedigree), or charge extra for papers

*Have more than one or two litters at any given time, or litters of multiple breeds

*Guarantee their dogs, or if they do, attach such unreasonable conditions to the guarantee, i.e., "dog must not be spayed or neutered, must never have been bred, and the ears must stand correctly," that it is unlikely that they would ever have to honor it

Phrases to be aware of in breeder's ads:

"Rare"--This is often because either the breeder is using the wrong term for a common trait (i.e., "teacup" for toy size) or the dogs in question have a trait that no responsible breeder would deliberately produce, either because it is not allowed or is considered a serious fault in the breed standard, and/or is associated with health problems in the breed (e.g. white Boxers and Dobermans, parti-colored Poodles, "king" Labs, lemon spotted Dalmatians, and blue-eyed Malamutes). Although it can also mean that the breed is not well known or widely recognized, it does almost always mean that the breeder expects you to pay megabucks for the privilege of owning one.

"Aggressive"--Most dogs are naturally protective, the extent depending on their breed and individual personalities. Why would anyone in their right mind deliberately breed dogs with unstable temperaments?

"Champion"--A dog becomes a breed champion by earning points defeating a specified number of other dogs of its breed in competition. A dog can have a whole wall full of blue ribbons, yet still not have earned a single point, let alone a championship title.

"Grand Champion"--the AKC does not award a Grand Champion title. Some other registries do, such as the UKC, but make sure the breeder explains how and where that title was earned.

"Champion lines"--Almost all dogs have some champions in their pedigrees if you go a few generations back. Ideally, at least one parent and the majority of the dogs listed in the pedigree should have a championship or other title.

"Champion puppies"--Dogs cannot be shown towards a championship before they are six months old. Maybe the breeder means that the parents are champions. Maybe it means that you'd be better off buying from somebody that's honest.

"OFA puppies"--OFA stands for Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, a registry that screens dogs for hip dysplasia. Dogs must be at least two years of age to be screened. If a breeder claims that any dog younger than that has OFA numbers, run!

"Show quality"--What does the breeder mean by this? Expected to finish a championship fairly easily? No disqualifying faults? Has "perfect markings and is really

cute?" Make sure you understand exactly what this means before you buy. By the way, unless you are serious about breeding and showing, there is nothing wrong with a dog that is "companion or pet quality."

"AKC registered (or just 'AKC')"--The AKC (American Kennel Club) is a registry that issues registration papers to dogs of the approximately 140 breeds that are currently recognized, whose parents were also registered. While great to have (essential if you plan to show and breed), AKC registration is no guarantee of a dog's quality, or of a breeder's integrity. Other popular registries include the United Kennel Club (UKC) and the American Rare Breeds Association (ARBA), as well as breed-specific registries such as the Australian Shepherd Club of America (ASCA). One warning: There are a number of "effigy registries" whose sole purpose is to provide "papers" for dogs who cannot be registered through one of the legitimate registries (breeder may have been banned from legitimate registry, parents may not be registered or registerable with legitimate registry, etc). If you are not familiar with the registry in question, ask around.
