

Five Questions You Must Ask a Dog Breeder

Consider these questions to help you determine a dog breeder's level of commitment.

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How can you identify a reputable breeder? By asking questions and plenty of them.

I think prospective pet owners should interview breeders, says 30-year Norfolk Terrier breeder Barbara Miller of Glen Head, N.Y. People should take advantage of the Internet today. Get into the breed, do your research, and come armed with specific questions.

Consider these questions to help you determine a breeder's level of commitment to his or her work:

1. Why are you doing this particular breeding? Reputable breeders breed to improve on their dogs, and, usually, to keep something for themselves. They should be able to explain how the two dogs they've chosen to breed complement one another, point out each one's strengths and weaknesses, and articulate how the resulting litter will hopefully improve on both.
2. Can I meet the dam? Because many breeders use an outside stud, you might not meet the litter's father. But you should meet the mother. While she should be protective of her litter, she should have a stable temperament and tolerate your presence. Note the conditions in which the breeder keeps her and the puppies: Whether in the house or a kennel, the surroundings should be clean and sanitary.
3. What health screenings have you done, and can I see the certificates? Before visiting the breeder, research the diseases and inheritable conditions prevalent in the breed. Every breed has something, and a reputable breeder will speak honestly about her efforts to ensure her breeding stock does not carry genetic defects.
4. What does your contract stipulate? Reputable breeders require that all pet-quality dogs be spayed or neutered, and will say so in their contract. Most also include a return to breeder clause, stating that if the owner gives up the dog at any age, for any reason, he or she must return the dog to the breeder.
5. Do you show? While not all reputable breeders show their dogs, and not all dog-show breeders are necessarily reputable, involvement in dog shows which are by definition a way to determine if one's dog is good enough to be bred shows a commitment to the breed. Membership in a national or regional breed club, and involvement in performance events such as fieldwork, also indicate the breeder's interest in more than just her bottom line.