



April 11, 2018

They crank out 2 million puppies a year, indiscriminate  
backyard breeders whose main goal is to make a buck selling

you the dog of your dreams. They can sound like sages of the breed, but when health and behavior problems crop up... it's buyer beware.

It's cheap and convenient. Want a dog? You can get on the internet right now, find a puppy within an easy drive of you and save a lot of money rather than going through hoops to get a puppy from an AKC-recognized breeder.

So why are so many people — including most recognized dog experts — telling you this is a big mistake? Because you're not buying a discount end table, you're buying a living thing, the newest member of your family. You didn't flip through the want ads when you decided to have a son or daughter. But this is different because it's....just a dog?

Why all the guilt trips? Because you're setting yourself up for heartbreak. And you're hurting the breed because as long as you're buying, they'll keep cranking the puppies out. And you're hurting *other* families who fall for the same trap you did. But at least you saved some money and it was easy...

Backyard breeders are not meticulous in how they breed and they're not interested in what happens to the dog once the sale is made. You're on your own. Good luck. Come again, just not too soon...

Today's purebreds are riddled with genetic disorders thanks to inbreeding. But you say you're avoiding all that by getting a mixed breed? Think again. What went into the mix? This and that from purebreds. You've simply reshuffled the mix, not avoided genetic problems from whatever breeds your dog sprang from.

The horrible truth is, sometimes people who go through the process and buy a puppy from a reputable breeder come to grief, too. Osteosarcoma. Hip dysplasia. Heart disease, liver shunt... the list goes on and on. Because in the dog world, not all breeders put the dogs first. Lies are told to protect reputations. Diseases in a line are kept secret. So even breeders who do their work and care foremost about their dogs are occasionally fooled.

If you've never had a dog who died young or fell wracked with pain from cancer or a similarly horrible disease, in this day and time you probably know someone who has. Getting a new dog today is a game of genetic Russian Roulette. You want to stack the odds in your favor however you can. The best breeder you can find is your best chance.

The best breeders break even or even lose money with every litter. They rarely breed and when they do, it's only after doggedly researching lineages for several generations back. They know their genetics. They don't pick mates simply because they won show ribbons. They spend hundreds of dollars testing dams and sires and hundreds more screening their puppies for disease, disorders and flaws. Only after getting to know you well will they sell to you, sometimes two years or more after your first contact.

And then there's those other guys.... Some ways to tell whether a seller is a backyard breeder:

### **Why Would You Want To Meet The Parents?**

Why would you care what the puppy's parents are like? He's oh-so-cute and looks just fine to you. You won't be taking the parents out to dinner or exchanging Christmas cards. What's the

big deal?

You want to know what your puppy's going to look like when he's grown, right? There can be considerable variations within the same breed. How's he going to act? Parents predict personality. How big will he be?

More important, what's their *genetic* background? The breeder should be able to walk you through several generations for both the mother and father. The breeder may not own the father so the father may not be on site, but they can show you photos, are intimately familiar with his personality and his genetics. Because they carefully studied before picking him.

**RED FLAG:** The breeder says he'll meet you somewhere offsite. To save you the drive, of course. If they won't let you come to their house and see the parents and the conditions there, keep on driving...

### **Let's Just Skip the Questions**

If a prospective breeder doesn't grill you like the Gestapo, you're in the wrong place. A good breeder sees her puppies as grandkids. So if they don't ask you about your income, your property's square-footage, your knowledge of dogs and commitment to the breed, look out.

**RED FLAG:** Will that be cash or check? If that's their *first* concern, roll on...

### **What Do We Need A Contract For?**

Responsible breeders may finally trust you enough to take their puppy home, but they set conditions in a legal contract just to be

sure. They spell out what medical tests are to be given when, vaccination schedules, and when the dog must be spayed or neutered. You'll likely only receive a limited registration from a top breeder because the good ones recognize that few are qualified to breed. Full registration only goes to other known reputable breeders. Finally, the contract will likely state that if for some reason you have to give the dog up, it goes directly back to the breeder.

**RED FLAG:** We don't need all that paperwork. Let's just shake on it... You trust *me*, right?

### **They're Weaned, Come And Get One Now**

Good breeders won't let a puppy go before it's at least eight weeks old, and most won't before they're ten weeks old. But they're on solid food. Why hang onto them for so long? Because those last few weeks with their mother and littermates are critical socialization time. It's when they learn to be dogs and get along with other dogs. To a backyard breeder though, the sooner they're gone, the better. One less mouth to feed.

**RED FLAG:** Sure, I know you can't wait to get your hands on this little cutie....What's the harm?

### **Why Not Get One Of Each?**

If a breeder produces more than one type of dog, look out. They're maximizing profit, not trying to improve the breed. To become proficient with any one breed can take decades because the genetics are that complicated. Understanding the breed standard and learning how to best approach it is a steep learning curve. Raising more than one breed at time well is unlikely.

**RED FLAG:** If you don't see what you like, keep looking. We have *others* !

### **Who Has Time For All Those Shows and Club Meetings?**

A top breeder is passionate about the breed. They mix with other like-minded owners and breeders. This is how they learn, support each other, stay honest in their dealings and work together to improve the breed. It's not elitism, it's being part of a larger whole.

Backyard breeders stay under the radar for obvious reasons.

**RED FLAG:** I don't need other people telling me what to do. Trust me, I *know* this breed.

### **You Probably Won't Have Time To Stay In Touch**

The hell I won't. If I'm a new puppy owner I'm going to need all the help I can get raising this little guy well. A good breeder will *insist* you give them regular reports of your puppy's progress. They're available when your puppy gets the runs, when she hurts a back paw from zooming around the yard, when she has her first season of heat, when she's old and has sore joints and one day when she's ready to leave you and cross the bridge. A good breeder is there the *entire life* of your puppy.

Once the check clears, backyard breeders will be vague, distant and hard to reach. They're done.

**RED FLAG:** Well the puppy was perfectly fine when I sold it to you. What have *you* done?

Backyard breeders are the scourge of any breed. You may save dollars on the front end, but you could end up spending much

more than you would have going to a qualified breeder in the long run. Vet bills and corrective surgeries can hit your wallet hard. Not to mention the heartache of seeing your dog ill or suffering from genetic problems that a reputable breeder weeded out of their line long ago.

It's your choice, of course.