

BREEDING YOUR DOG

Know the facts before breeding your dog

Three and a half million unwanted dogs are put to death in this country every year, with millions more dying through starvation, disease, accidents, and abuse. Nearly a quarter of these victims are purebred dogs. It is important to learn the facts and possible consequences if you are considering breeding your dog. In today's overcrowded world, we must make responsible decisions for our pets and for ourselves. Consider the following points carefully.

Quality – AKC registration is not an indication of quality. Most dogs, even purebred animals with papers, should not be bred. Many wonderful pets have defects of structure, personality, or health. Animals should be proven free of these defects, and only exceptional individuals should be used in an honest attempt to improve the breed. Ignorance is no excuse – once you have created a life, you are responsible for it, even if the pup is blind, crippled, epileptic, or a psychopath.

Cost – Breeding dogs is not a money-making proposition if done correctly. High prices are justified only by long showing records and excellent stock. Diagnosis of problems, proof of quality, adequate facilities, stud fees, and advertising are costly and must be paid before the pups can be sold. A pregnant or lactating female will increase her food requirements two- or three-fold and require regular veterinary attention. The pups will also require special foods, as well as inoculations and worming. An unexpected cesarean, emergency intensive care for a sick pup, or other complications will make a break-even litter a liability.

Sales – Placing puppies is not easy. There are not enough good homes to go around. Previous promises of "I want a dog just like yours" evaporate. It is unlikely that breeding your pet will produce a pup "just like her" (you would be more likely to get a similar dog by going back to the original breeder). Consider the time and expense of caring for pups that may not sell for many months, if at all. What would you do with your pups that did not sell? Would you be prepared to take back a dog if the owners can no longer care for it?

Education – Sex education for children is not a responsible reason for breeding your pet. The female dog is entitled to her privacy while giving birth, and if there are complications, children will be in the way. Witnessing delivery problems, or the death of the mother or pups, would be upsetting. Pups can be born with deformities and may need to be euthanized. Some dogs are not natural mothers and may ignore or attack their pups. Even a normal birth can be accompanied by the female screaming or attempting to bite, and is a messy process. Look at the long range effect: although you are exposing the children to the mechanics of birth, what are they learning about respect for the quality of life?

Risks – In addition to the risks associated with delivery, motherhood puts considerable physical stress on the female. Minerals, fats, and proteins are taken from her body, often resulting in weight loss, loss of coat, and other debilitating effects. Un-neutered male dogs face a greater risk of accidents, infections, physical stress, and wounds from fighting than neutered male dogs.

Time – Before breeding your dog, many hours will be spent working on pedigrees, locating a mate, doing paperwork, and interviewing potential buyers. Veteran breeders of quality dogs spend more than two hours daily raising a litter. The mother should be attended to during delivery; even after delivery, she will need extra care. The puppies will need daily checking, weighing, and socialization. They will also require grooming and training. The whelping box will need frequent cleaning. Be prepared for days off work and sleepless nights. If there are abnormal conditions, such as sick puppies or a mother who doesn't care for her pups, count on double the time.

Guidelines for breeding your dog

Most responsible breeders begin planning 1-2 years in advance. The primary goal of breeding should be to improve the breed. Typically you will not make money; you may even lose money. The following symbols are used to indicate expenses and income:

[-\$] cost <\$100 [-\$\$] cost >\$100 [+\$] income of >\$100

1. Learn more about your breed and breeding dogs. Talk to experienced breeders, attend shows, join your breed club, and read about dog breeding. We recommend the following books:

- Holst, Phyllis A. 1985. *Canine Reproduction: A Breeder's Guide*. Alpine Publications, Loveland, CO. 223 pp.
- Seranne, Ann. 1980. *The Joy of Breeding Your Own Show Dog*. Howell Division of Macmillan Publishing Co, New York, NY. 272 pp.

2. Determine that your bitch is of high quality. Minimally she should:

- Have at least a 3 (preferably 4 or 5) generation pedigree.
- Come from a line having at least 4 titled dogs in the last 3 generations.
- Be appropriately registered with AKC, UKC, or the parent club.
- Fit the breed standard.
- Be free of genetic defects.
- Have a good temperament.
- Be capable of performing the task(s) for which the breed was developed.
- Be in excellent health.

3. Ensure that your bitch is an appropriate age to be bred. Bitches must be full grown and old enough to be screened for genetic defects. For example, hip dysplasia cannot be diagnosed with certainty until the dog is at least 2 years old. Bitches who are too old may have difficulty whelping or producing milk.

4. Have your bitch screened by your veterinarian for genetic defects, particularly those common to the breed. Some tests or evaluations must be done by specialists. For example, hip x-rays should be examined and certified by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals. [-\$\$]

5. Determine when your bitch is likely to be in season. Planning, breeding, whelping, and raising a litter take a lot of time. Be certain that your schedule will allow you to devote the necessary time and effort to care for the pregnant bitch and the puppies when they arrive.

6. Decide whether you will linebreed (breed to a close relative) or outcross (breed to an individual that is not a close relative). In general, linebreeding produces more uniform litters, but undetected harmful traits are more likely to appear along with good traits. Outcrossing produces more variable litters, but harmful traits are less likely to appear.

7. Find a good stud that meets all the criteria for quality that your bitch did. All dogs have faults and the stud should be selected to complement the bitch; they should not have the same faults. Selecting a suitable mate takes time; don't wait until the female is in season. Go to local shows, consult breeders, and attend the breed's National Specialty Show to find the best stud.

8. Find out what the stud fee will be, whether you will be required to sign a contract, and what conditions are contained in the contract. In general, contracts are used to specify terms and protect both owners. [-\$\$]

9. Line up buyers for the puppies as far in advance as possible. Buyers can be found by contacting other breeders and your local kennel club to solicit referrals and by advertising in breed publications. Advertising in local newspapers is not generally a good idea. Many experienced breeders will not breed their dogs until they have buyers for at least half the litter. [-\$]

10. Screen potential buyers (be prepared to turn away irresponsible owners):

- How knowledgeable are they about dogs?
- How familiar are they with your breed and why did they choose it?

- Are they motivated to learn more?
- Have they owned a dog before? When?
- Have they ever given a dog up? Why? How?
- At what ages and why did their previous dogs die?
- How many people are in the family and what are their ages?
- Do they have other pets?
- Do they have a fenced yard?
- Will the dog live in the house or in the yard?
- Do they live in the city or country?
- Will they spend the time and money it takes to own and train a dog?

11. Draw up an Agreement to Purchase contract if puppies are reserved, and have the buyer sign it. Decide whether to require a deposit.

12. Plan how you will get the bitch to the stud. If the stud is not nearby, prepare to drive or make airline arrangements. You will need a shipping crate that meets airline specifications. [-\$\$]

13. Take the bitch to her veterinarian for a checkup. Unless your dog was vaccinated very recently, she will need booster shots to protect her pups. [-\$]

14. Consider scheduling veterinary tests such as vaginal smears and progesterone assays to determine when breeding should be attempted. [-\$]

15. Attempt to breed the dogs. If they are incompatible, artificial insemination may be necessary. Breeding must be supervised to prevent injuries. [-\$]

16. Drive to pick up your bitch (if she is stressed by flying) to minimize the chance of abortion or resorption. [-\$]

17. Have your veterinarian determine whether the bitch is pregnant a month after breeding, if you want to be certain that she conceived. [-\$]

18. Get ready for pups:

- Buy or build a whelping box; put it in a warm, quiet, and secluded place that is easily accessible. [-\$]
- Have special food to feed the bitch during the final stages of pregnancy and while she is nursing pups. [-\$]
- Have milk replacer on hand. [-\$]
- Learn what to expect with normal and abnormal births.
- Have the equipment that you will need if there are complications. [-\$]
- Be prepared to assist the birth and cleaning of the pups if necessary.
- Be prepared to get veterinary assistance if necessary.
- Read about raising pups. We recommend:
The Monks of New Skete. 1991. *The Art of Raising a Puppy*. Little, Brown and Company, Boston, MA. 274 pp. [-\$]

19. Attend the bitch while she is whelping. You may want to record the number of placentas passed, the birth order, and the times of the births.

20. Take the bitch to the veterinarian for a checkup the day after the pups are born. She may also need a "clean-out" shot of oxytocin if she didn't pass all the placentas, or if she isn't producing enough milk. [-\$]

21. Take the puppies to the veterinarian when they are about 2 days old, if you are going to have their dewclaws removed or tails docked. [-\$]

22. Keep track of the pups' weights to make sure they are gaining. This indicates that the bitch is producing enough milk and the pups are healthy and suckling well. Use differently collared collars on nearly identical pups. They must be distinguishable for registration purposes.

23. Begin feeding the pups solid food at about 3 weeks of age. They will require special puppy food. They should not be completely weaned until they are about 6 weeks old. [-\$]

24. Schedule appointments for worming and immunizations at intervals determined by your veterinarian. [-\$]

25. Socialize your pups. They should be handled gently by you from birth. When they are 5 weeks old, begin non-stressful socialization with other people and introducing the pups to a variety of objects. The pups are susceptible to diseases until they have had their third set of shots at 3 months of age. Don't expose the pups to other dogs before then. After that time, take them everywhere; introduce them to other animals and new situations. Puppy kindergarten is highly recommended.

26. Arrange for temperament testing for each puppy at 7 weeks of age. We recommend the Puppy Aptitude Test by Joachim and Wendy Volhard (from the March 1979 issue of the *AKC Gazette*; reprinted in *The Art of Raising a Puppy*, see above).

27. Register the litter with the AKC, UKC, or the parent club (if your dog is a rare breed). [-\$]

28. Obtain (or prepare yourself) a 3-5 generation pedigree. [-\$]

29. Evaluate the puppies to decide which are show quality and which are pet quality; you may want to ask other breeders for their help. Decide on the purchase price of each puppy.

30. Draw up a Sale Agreement to be signed when the buyer takes the puppy. Talk to other breeders to find out what is customary. A clause agreeing to take the puppy back within a specific amount of time with a refund of the purchase price is typically included. Responsible breeders usually stipulate that they have first option to take the dog back (without a refund) if it must be given up at any age, or that they must be consulted about its placement. This is done to prevent the dog from going to an animal shelter, a bad home, or a puppy mill. Contracts for pet-quality pups should include a spay/neuter clause. You should consider limited registrations for pet-quality pups.

31. Make arrangements to ship the pup to the buyer if necessary. You will need a shipping crate that meets airline specifications. Pups should be at least 7 weeks old before being taken from their mother and litter mates. [-\$\$]

32. Give the buyer:

- A copy of the signed sale contract in exchange for payment. [+\$]
- A copy of the litter registration and of the pup's pedigree.
- The pup's health records and a schedule for future vaccinations.
- A collar with the pup's ID tag. [-\$]
- Bedding or a toy the pup is familiar with. [-\$]
- Information about the breed and breed club.
- Information about individual registration of the pup.

33. Suggest that the buyer have:

- A leash
- A crate and information on crate-training.
- The brand of puppy food the puppy is used to.
- Bowls for food and water.
- Grooming tools.
- Books on raising puppies and on the pup's breed.

- Information about house-training and supplies for cleaning up accidents.

34. Be prepared to answer the buyer's questions about the dog for the rest of its life.

35. Decide what to do with puppies that you might not place and would have to keep for an extended period – perhaps for the life of the dog. Having healthy puppies put to sleep, or taking pups to the pound are not responsible solutions.