

Should I Breed My Dog?



There is sad evidence of abandoned dogs and overpopulated shelters nearly worldwide. However, many breeds we know and love today would not exist save for the commitment of dog breeders. There are many committed professional breeders who have invested a lifetime of love, work and money in striving to preserve and promote their breed of choice, as well as dedicated, ethical “hobby breeders” that breed only one or a few litters.

A decision to breed dogs should not come from:

- a desire for personal status
- what is popular
- profit alone

Whether a professional or a hobbyist, those who seek to be breeders should ensure they can meet the following critical commitments:

Health

Will I do all I can to produce healthy puppies?

Generally speaking, healthy parents are more likely to have healthy puppies. Although health problems can occur in any dog, by responsibly breeding from health-screened dogs, you and your puppy buyers can be reassured that every step has been taken to give your puppies the best chance of a healthy life.

Many of the hereditary diseases that can be passed onto offspring may need long-term medications, and other diseases may lead to early death. By running certain screening tests prior to breeding, you can reduce the risks for certain problems in the dog’s future litter.

There are screening tests for conditions of structure, eyes, heart, immune system, breathing and more. Some of the tests can be performed in your vet’s office, while other tests need to be performed by veterinary specialists. Good and reputable breeders screen their dogs for certain traits to prevent litters of puppies with health problems.

As important as physical health is, it’s vital that your dog has a good temperament. Different personality traits may be important for different breeds, but any dog that you breed from shouldn’t be shy, nervous, unpredictable or aggressive.

Time

Do I have enough time to ensure the health and well-being of the litter?

Having a litter of puppies is hard work and takes a considerable amount of time. Before you breed your dog, think about whether you will have enough time to:

- Be with your dog while she is in labour? Labour can start at any time of the day or night and can last for many hours.
- Take time off work to care for the puppies? To start with, they will need to be checked continually to ensure they're all thriving and feeding well from the mother.
- Care for your dog after labour and make sure she is recovering and eating.
- Groom, train, socialize and clean up after all of your puppies. It's lots of fun to have puppies, but it's hard work, especially if your dog has a large litter (some litters in certain breeds can include 10 to 12 puppies). Puppies usually go to their new homes after eight weeks so that they will be with you for quite some time.
- Take your puppies to the vets for their vaccinations, microchipping and worming advice.
- Organize the sale of your puppies. You may need to advertise, talk to prospective owners, interview them, introduce them to your puppies and answer all their questions.
- Be there should something go wrong, such as hand feeding the puppies if your dog has problems producing milk.

Money

Can I afford to have puppies?

Let's talk money. If you think you're going to get rich breeding dogs then think again. Yes, certain breeds can sell for large sums of money, but that is not the norm and there are definitely costs you need to consider before you ever get to the stage of selling puppies.

As we discussed earlier, pre breeding health testing needs to be completed. Depending on the breed, this might be hip scoring, eye tests, heart scans, or other genetic blood tests. Your dog may unknowingly be carrying a gene that could cause all kinds of problems in her puppies and that is something that clearly needs to be known beforehand.

Once the puppies come along you will need to feed them a quality food, pay for them to be vet checked, vaccinated and microchipped, as well as treat them for worms and other parasites. If you have a big litter then those costs can really add up.

And then what if things go wrong? What about the unexpected cost of pregnancy?

Emergency C-sections: We all hope that pregnancies go well, but sometimes things don't go as planned. While a majority of dogs whelp (birth) at home without any major difficulties, there are others that may struggle and require emergency Caesarean-sections. Emergency C-sections can be risky for both the puppies and the mother because many occur when the dogs are already in distress. If your dog does have trouble whelping, your regular veterinarian may not be available to do the surgery, and you may need to go to the nearest emergency vet for care. This can be an unexpected and costly experience for breeders. For some breeds, like French Bulldogs, that traditionally have problems whelping, the breeders will schedule a c-section according to the dog's due date. Even then, sometimes things don't go according to plan and the dog may need emergency care.

Nursing problems: Some females just can't produce enough milk to feed all their puppies. Other times, there may be a puppy or two that doesn't understand how to nurse. You may have to step in and help bottle feed the new puppies. While the image of bottle feeding a puppy once or twice seems adorable, newborn puppies may require a feeding every couple of hours. It's just like having a newborn child in the house, getting up throughout the night for feedings and care.

No maternal instinct: Believe it or not, some females show no interest at all in mothering her pups. A new mother may push the pups away or ignore their cries. In some cases, the mother may actually harm her pups. This doesn't mean that she isn't a good dog; it just means that, for whatever reason, she isn't accepting of her pups. If this happens with your dog, you may need to raise the pups completely until they are ready to go to their new homes.

If you're reading this then I'm sure this won't apply to you, but if you go down the route of breeding your dog, it is a conscious decision to place your girl in this situation, and these are real risks that you need to accept. As such you must have the means to pay for the care your dog needs when they need it.

For Life

Can I find good homes for the puppies for their well-being throughout their lifetime?

Where will the puppies go? To good, loving homes is the obvious answer. But just how easy is this to be sure of?

Your friends and family might have sounded interested when you mentioned to them the idea of having puppies but it's amazing how that interest vanishes when the puppies materialize. You might think that you will be flooded with wannabe buyers after placing an ad online but even if this is true, you've still got a lot of work to do.

Screening potential owners is vital. You need to know what their family and lifestyle is like. Are they out of the house all day in the week, are there other pets in the house, what about children, do they have a garden or live in an apartment? You need to find out as much as possible to make sure that the new home you are sending your puppies to is as suitable as possible.

If you make the wrong judgement then it may well be that your puppy ends up in a shelter and the sad reality is that many shelter dogs are euthanized through no fault of their own.

Maybe your energetic puppy wasn't suited to being by themselves for 12 hours a day and started chewing the furniture. Your large breed dog might have become too big for the owners home. You can't predict every eventuality but it is important you try.

It's even more important if you find your dog having puppies just before Christmas. Unfortunately people still think it's a good idea to surprise someone by giving them a puppy they don't want and don't have time for. That's not a good start to a companionship that should last a lifetime.

If you are unable to answer these questions, you may not yet be ready to begin breeding your dog. We encourage you to research into the aspects of breeding mentioned above so that you are more prepared for the experience.