

# How to Find a Reputable Breeder

- Thorough research is important to ensure the breed fits with your lifestyle.
- Ask for recommendations, research websites, then interview and visit several breeders before making a decision.
- Reputable breeders will specialize in only one or two breeds, raise a limited number of litters a year, and offer a written contract with a health guarantee.
- A visit to the breeder is important to ensure that animals are raised in a clean, well-socialized environment.
- Many purebred animals are also available through rescue organizations and shelters.

### How Do I Find a Reputable Breeder?

Before you even look for a breeder, it's important to fully research the breed you are considering. Ensuring that the breed's temperament, exercise needs, and grooming requirements are a good match with your own lifestyle will make for a better long-term relationship for both you and the pet. Talk to owners who have the breed you are considering and observe them interacting with their pets to aid your decision if this is the right breed for you.

Start by asking for recommendations from local and national breed clubs and breed rescue groups, as well as from your veterinarian. Most reputable breeders will have a website you can refer to for more information. It is important for you to interview and visit more than one breeder before you make your choice. Breed shows can be a good starting point and allow you to talk with many breeders at one time.

Be aware that many people who sell pets through newspaper ads and pet stores may be running puppy or kitten mills. As you may know, animals in these facilities are often inbred, unsocialized, and raised in overcrowded cages in unsanitary conditions. Even though they are only there for a few weeks, these animals can often have a lifetime of health and behavior problems. That's one more reason why you will want to visit the breeding facility before deciding on a puppy or kitten.

### What Are the Qualities of a Reputable Breeder?

A responsible breeder:

- ***Is selective about where their puppies and kittens are placed.*** A good breeder will interview you as much as you interview them. They will want to know if you are prepared to house, train, and care for the pet for a lifetime, and if you understand the exercise and grooming needs of the animal.

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- ***Provides an individual veterinary health record for the pet, and a health guarantee.*** The pet should have received at least one set of vaccines and have been checked and treated for parasites, which are very common in young animals. The record should show that there are no obvious birth defects, diseases, or other health issues, such as heart murmurs. The breeder should specify what they have done to protect animals from infectious diseases such as distemper, parvovirus, feline leukemia, and feline immunodeficiency virus, and how you would be compensated should the pet become ill in the weeks after you take it home. A good breeder will offer proof of screening, such as OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) and PennHIP hip certification, for potential genetic problems that are common to that breed.
- ***Raises the litter in the home with the family.*** Early socialization with people and animals

## Choices and Considerations

is crucial for young pets. Animals who are isolated in cages or pens outside the home may have difficulty forming relationships with people and animals later. What's more, pets who are raised in small cages are often harder to housetrain.

- **Only specializes in one or two breeds.** A breeder with multiple breeds and multiple litters has different motivations than the breeder who focuses on a single breed. You want a breeder who is extremely knowledgeable about the breed and is willing to honestly discuss the positives and negatives you may encounter, including potential genetic problems.
- **Produces a limited number of litters a year.** Even though you may be placed on a waiting list for a new puppy or kitten, you can feel more confident that the breeder is placing much thought, planning, and care into each animal.
- **Does not sell kittens and puppies before 8 weeks of age.** Young animals that are separated from their mother and the rest of the litter too early may have difficulty with socialization. By eight weeks of age they should be weaned from the mother and eating a commercial puppy or kitten food.
- **Provides a written contract.** The contract should not only outline the financial details, but provide information on registration, rights, ownership, spay or neuter requirements, and a return policy, should the need arise.

### What Questions Should I Ask the Breeder?

It's important for you to visit the breeding facility where your puppy or kitten has been raised. During your visit, consider asking questions such as:

- **Can I see where puppies or kittens are housed?** Obviously, you will want the area to be clean and well-maintained, with room for exercise. Kittens and cats should have clean litter boxes and be well groomed. The animals should be happy and healthy, and comfortable around people.
- **Can I call other families who have purchased pets from you?** A reputable breeder will be happy to provide you with a long list.
- **What kind of food are you feeding?** Good breeders don't skimp on the quality of the food during the important developmental months.
- **Can I see the mother and other adult animals?** Look for well-socialized adult animals that are at ease with people. The breeder should also know the ancestry of not just the parents, but prior generations.
- **Can I bring my family?** You should be encouraged to bring your entire family, on multiple visits, to ensure the animal will fit into your household.

Another option to working with a breeder is to search shelters and rescue sites. It's estimated that one in every four dogs in animal shelters is purebred. It's a great way to give a good animal a second chance at life.