

SMART PUPPY BUYER'S GUIDE



If you're looking for a new dog, check your local RSPCA or other animal rescue group first. There are many wonderful puppies and dogs out there looking for new homes.

But if you can't find the right dog for you, or have your heart set on a specific breed, you'll need to find a good breeder.

Here's how to go about it.



Follow our Smart Puppy Buyer's Guide and you'll be on the right track to taking home a healthy, well-adjusted puppy and helping to prevent the sale of puppies from puppy mills or irresponsible breeders.

Healthy puppies come from breeders who:

1. Plan ahead and aim to find good homes for every puppy they breed
2. Provide a high standard of care and living conditions for all their dogs
3. Are genuinely concerned about the welfare of their dogs
4. Are open to questions and provide a complete history of the puppy
5. Make sure that you will suit the puppy and the puppy will suit you
6. Breed to produce happy, healthy pets, free from known genetic disorders
7. Provide ongoing support and information to new owners
8. Provide a guarantee
9. Provide references on request
10. Meet all their legal requirements

Finding a good breeder means asking these important questions:

1. Did the breeder plan ahead for this litter?

A responsible dog breeder plans each pregnancy and knows that there is enough demand for their puppies to ensure they will all go to good homes.

Ask the breeder if this pregnancy was planned, how many litters the mother has already had (six should be the maximum over her whole life), and what they will do with any unsold puppies (a good breeder will hang on to them until the right home can be found).

2. Are you impressed with the standard of care and living conditions of the dogs?

It's really important that you visit the puppy in the place where it was born and meet its mum (and dad too, if he's around).

- Check whether the place is clean and there is enough space for the puppies and adult dogs to move around and exercise and there are things for the pups to chew on and play with.
- Ask what the puppies are fed and how often. A good breeder will provide information on how to feed your puppy before you take it home.
- Ask about health checks, worming and vaccinations and what documents will come home with your puppy. A good breeder will make sure all puppies have a full veterinary health check and are microchipped, vaccinated and treated for worms and fleas before they are sold, and will provide you with records of these treatments.
- Watch how the puppies and the adult dogs in the home behave – are they friendly with people and other dogs? A good breeder will make sure the puppies and breeding dogs are friendly and well-socialised.

If the breeder is reluctant for you to visit, or wants you to meet the puppy in another place, find another breeder. Puppy farms will often use a house as a 'shop front' so you don't get to see the poor conditions they breed dogs in. Don't buy a puppy from a pet shop or through an internet or newspaper advertisement without being able to visit its home, as you can't check out the conditions in which the puppy was bred or know where it came from.



PUPPY FARMS

A puppy mill or puppy farm is a mass-production facility that breeds puppies for profit. The puppies and their mothers are often kept in very poor conditions. Breeding animals may be continually mated and kept with their puppies in cages and never allowed out to exercise, play, have companionship or even go to the toilet. Puppies born in puppy farms often have long-term health and behavioural problems as a result of poor housing conditions, poor maternal nutrition and a lack of adequate socialisation during the crucial first few weeks of life.

3. Is the breeder genuinely concerned about the welfare of their dogs?

Good breeders want the best for all their animals, from new puppies to retired breeding dogs. They take steps to ensure this by providing detailed advice to new owners about how to care for their puppy, and don't have old breeding dogs put down because they're no longer productive.

- Ask the breeder what happens to their retired breeding animals – are they kept or rehomed?
- If the breed you've chosen was traditionally docked, what is the breeder's view on tail docking? (Routine tail docking of puppies is no longer legal in Australia.)
- If you are not intending to breed from your puppy, the breeder should provide advice on desexing (unless your puppy has been desexed already).

You should be provided with information on diet, socialisation, registration and identification requirements, and any medications or vaccinations given or required in the future.

4. Is the breeder open to questions and do they provide a complete history of the puppy?

Good breeders want to make sure you are well-informed about your new puppy and will provide information on the background, size, breed and temperament of his parents. They are willing to answer questions and allow inspection of records and paperwork such as registration documents and veterinary records. A breeder who refuses to answer reasonable questions probably has something to hide.

5. Does the breeder make sure you will suit the puppy and the puppy will suit you?

A new puppy is a long-term commitment, so both you and the breeder need to be certain you are making the right decision. A good breeder will ask you questions to make sure this is the right puppy for you and that you're able to care for it properly.

For example, they might ask:

- if you have children or other animals in the household
- where your puppy will be sleeping, and
- how often it will be left on its own.



They should also tell you what to expect from the breed, such as how suitable it is for families and how much space and exercise is needed. If you're at all uncomfortable with what you are told, you might want to consider another breed.

6. Is your puppy bred to be a pet and free from known inherited disorders?

Different breeds are predisposed to different inherited disorders or diseases. Some of these aren't apparent until later in a dog's life but can have devastating consequences. Some breeds also have exaggerated features that can cause problems, like a squashed-in face, which makes it hard to breathe, or very short legs, which can lead to spinal problems.

A good breeder will be aware of, and screen for, any known disorders or anatomical problems specific to the breed and will exclude dogs with problems from breeding. They will be able to show you copies of veterinary reports and screening tests to confirm this. They should also breed to minimise any exaggerated physical traits specific to the breed that are known to have an adverse impact on the health and welfare of the dog.

- Find out what inherited diseases occur in your chosen breed (an internet search for inherited diseases and the breed name will help you) and ask the breeder what steps they have taken to prevent them.
- One proven way to minimise the risk of inherited problems is to avoid breeding closely related animals. If you are buying a purebred dog, you should check your puppy's pedigree to make sure there are no close relative matings, such as brother-sister or grandfather-granddaughter matings.
- Ask the breeder what they think are the most important characteristics in their puppies. A good breeder will put health, welfare and temperament above appearance. Some breeders put success in the show ring above all else, but breed prizes such as 'best in show' don't mean that a dog's puppies will be good family pets as show dogs are judged on their appearance, not their behaviour.

7. Does the breeder offer to provide ongoing support and information after purchase?

A good breeder will provide full contact details and encourage you to get in touch if you need more information on the care of your new puppy.

8. Does the breeder provide a guarantee?

What if you take the puppy home and it has a health problem, or doesn't get on with your children or pet cat and you can't cope? A good breeder will offer to take back unwanted animals within a specified time period after sale. They should also offer to accept animals returned as a result of problems arising from an inherited disorder at any time after sale.

9. Does the breeder provide references to back up what they have told you?

You've asked a lot of questions, but you'd like to be absolutely sure that the breeder is genuine. A good breeder will readily provide references on request, including testimonials from previous or existing owners, letters from the vet, and documents indicating membership of a breed association, canine council or companion animal club.



10. Is the breeder meeting all legal requirements?

Requirements for dog breeders vary from state to state, but it's a good idea to call your local council and ask whether breeders have to be registered with them and if there is a code of practice or guidelines that they should be following. If the answer's yes, you can ask the breeder for their registration details and what guidelines they follow.

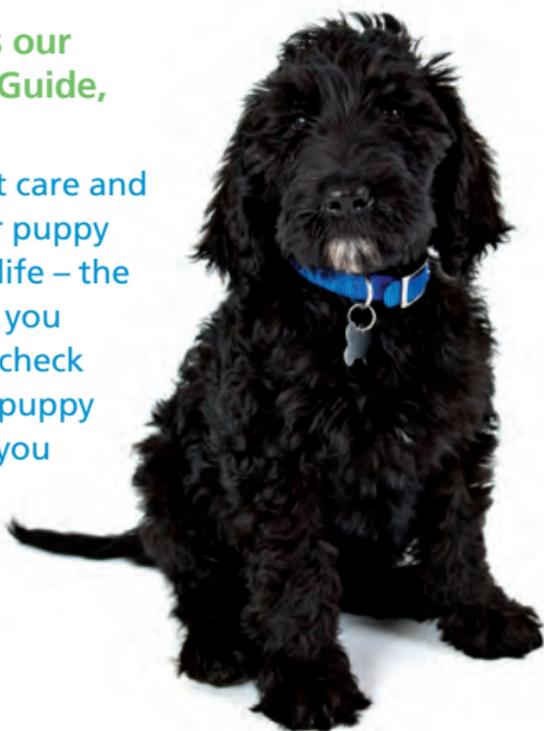
REGISTERED BREEDERS

Pedigree or purebred dog breeders are often referred to as 'registered breeders' when they are members of a breed club or association that operates a stud book or register. The term may also be used to refer to someone who is registered with their local council as a breeder (also called a 'recognised' breeder).

While breed associations do have rules and guidelines for their members, being 'registered' does not necessarily mean a breeder is responsible or meets good animal welfare standards. To make sure your breeder is a good breeder, you need to ask the right questions before you buy. That's why we've written this guide.

If your breeder meets our Smart Puppy Buyer's Guide, Congratulations!

Thanks to their excellent care and breeding practices, your puppy has had a great start in life – the rest is up to you. Before you take your puppy home, check out our information on puppy training and make sure you talk to your local vet about desexing!



WHY DESEXING IS SO IMPORTANT

Desexing isn't just about preventing unwanted pregnancies, it can actually make your dog healthier and happier.

Desexed dogs:

- are better protected from certain illnesses and diseases
- are generally less aggressive towards other dogs
- tend to be more affectionate
- are less inclined to roam or mark their territory
- are less inclined to display mating behaviours such as mounting

Some research shows desexed dogs actually live longer.

The RSPCA practises early age desexing from the age of eight weeks when the surgery is simple and recovery is rapid. If your puppy was not desexed prior to sale, they must be desexed before they are able to produce any unintended litters of puppies. There is absolutely no benefit in letting females have one litter before they are desexed.

Talk to your vet about desexing, microchipping and vaccinations. They're all important parts of being a responsible dog owner and will ensure your new best friend stays healthy and happy.

OTHER USEFUL LINKS:

- RSPCA Knowledgebase www.kb.rspca.org.au
- RSPCA Pet Insurance www.rspcapetinsurance.org.au
- World of Animal Welfare www.woaw.org.au

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