

TO BREED OR NOT TO BREED – THAT IS THE QUESTION

Sierra Milton

So you think you want to breed a litter of puppies. There are some important questions to ask before you take that first big step. The first, and perhaps most important, question is "Why?". The answers will be as varied as the people who own dogs. Do you want to have a puppy "just like" your dog? Do you want to breed your dog because people have told you how they would love to have one of the puppies? Did you pay a substantial amount of money for your dog and believe that you can recoup some of that money? Do you want to make some money? Do you want your children to experience the wonders of birth and nature? Do you believe that breeding your dog will make a significant contribution to the breed? These are some of the reasons given for breeding.

"I want to breed so that I can have another dog just like this one!" Chances are you will not get a puppy "just like" yours. Remember that your dog is only one-half of the genetic make-up of the puppies. Your dog is the result of genes from both his/her dam and sire and the possibility that the puppies will turn out just like yours is remote unless you have carefully researched the parentage lines behind your dog and the proposed stud and understand the probabilities of what type of offspring should be produced from them.

"Everyone tells me how much they like my dog and would love to have a puppy from her/him!" Most people will change their minds when actually confronted with that furry bundle of energy and the promises to buy one will evaporate. Try taking deposits before you breed and see what type of response you have. As a first-time breeder, you will not have established a reputation and will not have referrals or references for your puppies. That little four-legged bundle of fur is not "just like" your dog. The puppy will not be housebroken, obedient, come when called, and, most likely, will keep the new owners up at night for the first week or so. Your friend then returns the puppy, saying they just don't have time for a dog and you now have a four-month old puppy that is chewing everything in sight, not quite as cuddly as it was, and needing all its vaccinations that you have to try to re-home.

"You can always sell purebred puppies and make some money." You've paid £250 for your dog and got him at quite a bargain because lots of those breeders with established kennel names were asking £400 for their puppies, so you just know that you'll be able to breed your dog and sell the puppies for £300 each and make a substantial amount of money. So, with money racing around in your head, you set out to breed your dog. Let's not even consider the substantial medical testing that one should do prior to breeding to make sure that no genetic tragedies are passed along, we'll just consider the bare minimum of expenditures. First, there is the stud fee. If *your* dog is worth £250 and you're going to make all this money selling puppies, it's fair to say that the owner of the stud dog will probably consider him to be worth at least £250 or more for his services. Now, we've paid out the stud fee and it's getting close to the time that the puppies are due. Your expectant female has been eating a lot more lately (normally about 30% more from about the fourth week of pregnancy and about three times the normal amount after the puppies are born until they are about four weeks old). There's the

blankets and towels that the puppies lay on; all the food that they eat after they are weaned and before they are sold; advertising to sell the puppies; and that is not taking into consideration any problems that might arise requiring veterinarian attention during the whelping or for any problems with the mother or sickly puppies after the puppies are born. All these things are expenditures before even the first puppy is sold. For a very realistic look at the various costs of raising puppies, you should take a good look at the [charts](#).

"I want my children to see the miracle of birth." This can be a very expensive and traumatic lesson for the children. Remember that birth can also be very tragic. Your children may be seeing the joy of new life at 4 o'clock in the morning while their precious pet is on the surgery table cut open and hemorrhaging. Or they may be listening to her scream as she tries to give birth to a puppy that is too large and is turning to snap at the puppy and you in her pain. Then there are the still-born puppies, mummified puppies (something went awry in development and instead of the puppy being aborted naturally, it shriveled up and dried, being born black and ready to rot; these puppies can be the result of poor prenatal nutrition and quite often the bitch will then have uterine infections after giving birth), "water puppies" (these are puppies that seemingly have no skeletal development and seem to be gel-filled; these may be linked to a viral infection that the bitch had during pregnancy – remember that medical care before birth is another expense); puppies with birth defects that either die soon after birth or must be humanely destroyed. Or the birth may have gone great and the mother suddenly develops eclampsia (a calcium deficiency linked to the demands of lactation and can be severely predisposed by prior calcium supplementation), running a high fever with muscle spasms, unable to stand and eventually having seizures. While planning for the children to witness the miracle of birth, be sure to take them to the local shelter on euthanasia day so that they can witness the reality of death for the scores of dogs who have no homes.

"I believe that the puppies resulting from the breeding will be an asset to the development of the breed." This is, in my opinion, the only reason that any one should consider breeding a litter and even then there are serious questions to consider. You should have spent at least two to three years of serious interest in the breed, including belonging to various breed and working clubs, completed in shows (in conformation, obedience and/or agility) or performance events to demonstrate your dog's worthiness to be bred, have a substantial knowledge of the history of your breed and its standard, have looked at as many different lines and specimens of your breed as possible (you will learn as much looking at poor specimens as you do with outstanding specimens, provided there is a balance between the two), and talked extensively with the old-timers of the breed about their experiences and where they see the breed going (even if you don't necessarily agree on all issues, these people still have a wealth of information). Your dog should closely match the breed standard and free of any temperament problems or serious health or genetic defects. Look at your dog with critical eyes, seeing all the faults as well as all the good aspects; a critical eye is mandatory if you seriously want to breed better dogs. And, after taking all this into consideration, you need to ask yourself if you can ensure that the puppies produced go to the types of homes that you would want to live in.

"Okay, I think I still want to breed."

Breeding a litter of puppies is a major responsibility. You should consider whether you have the time, energy, financial and physical resources, space, facilities, and knowledge to undertake this responsibility. If you bring a litter of puppies into the world, it is your responsibility to properly care for them before and after they are born, as well as finding responsible, loving homes for them.

Breeding, done properly, requires a lot of your valuable time. There are late night and wee morning feedings, ensuring that the temperature of the room remains constant, trips to the veterinarian and to the stud dog, endless cleaning of the whelping and puppy pen, laundry, phone calls from prospective owners and the just-curious.

If you've ever watched the movie "The Money Pit" where a couple purchased an old home to renovate and then found they were paying endless expenses trying to renovate it, you will then understand the comparison to your cash outflow when you breed a litter. Here is a partial list of considerations: medical testing for genetic defects, prenatal veterinarian care, worming of your bitch, postnatal veterinarian check-up, inoculations and worming for the puppies, purchase of whelping box and whelping supplies (towels, scissors, hemostats, disinfectant, iodine, thermometer, etc.), heating lamp, cleaning supplies (paper towels, detergent, disinfectant, etc.), stud fee, puppy food and vitamins, advertising, lost salaries and sleep, not to mention any unplanned expenses such as birthing complications or sickly puppies or dam. (See [charts](#) for realistic expenditures.)

You need to decide where you are going to raise the puppies. Newly born puppies need a draft-free, temperature constant environment to thrive, just like other newborns. While it should be in a quieter part of the house, I don't believe that puppies should be raised in isolation and strict quiet. Puppies, like babies, become well-adjusted adults when they are part of the mainstream of the household. For that reason, I make sure that the puppies could hear everyday noises, such as vacuuming, television and radio, kitchen noises, people talking, etc. I also try to provide the puppies with visual stimulation once the eyes are opened. You will need, however, to consider that six or eight growing puppies need a bit of room and can be noisy. Because they are not housebroken and the mother will quit cleaning up after them long before they go to new homes, you need a space that can be easily cleaned and disinfected to provide a sanitary and odour-inoffensive environment. If outside temperatures permit, the space ideally will be located close to where you can take the puppies out for a bit during the day once they have started exploring their inside environment. If you are going to raise the puppies in a kennel-situation, you need to insure that the kennel is well insulated and draft-free with electricity for light (puppies should not be left in lightless places) and a heating lamp. You'll need a space for yourself and whoever is going to help you so that you can sit by the mother and puppies during the first week of their life and spend time socializing them after that.

You need to consider whether your work schedule and lifestyle will permit you to breed a litter of puppies. Can you afford to stay home for a week or so after the puppies are born? Can you arrange your schedule quickly if your bitch goes into labour early? Do you have pressing family events planned that may conflict with that time? If so, are you prepared to stay home with your new responsibilities? What about your daughter's recital or your favorite niece's wedding? Is your family prepared to let you make these sacrifices? Who is going to help you when the

puppies are born? Who is going to guide you through a difficult birth, teach you about tying off an umbilical cord and making sure that the placentas are completely expelled? Do you know how to supplement a sickly puppy who is not thriving?

Breeding means sacrificing a 'normal' life in many cases. These are things that the average person never considers when thinking about breeders. These are choices that breeders make when they decide to breed. The welfare and future of the dogs are completely in **their** hands.

Another consideration is whether you have the space, energy and time to keep puppies that are not sold right away. Puppy purchasers need to be carefully screened. Will you be able to turn down those people who don't seem responsible even when the puppy is twelve or fourteen weeks old and are becoming needle-toothed, destructive, barking imps that seem to eat, sleep, potty and potty again? Are you prepared to take back a puppy after it has lost its cute-potential and the owners find out that a puppy, like a child, requires work and training to be a well-adjusted member of the family? You may also be unlucky enough to have a puppy owner call you after a year and tell you that the puppy has severe hip dysplasia or cataracts and wants you to take the dog back and refund the money. Or the dog may have started biting his or the neighbour's children and you're suddenly faced with a lawsuit for producing an aggressively-temperament dog (even though the person may have a new partner and children who are absolutely horrid to the dog and the biting is environmentally produced, lawsuits mean money to defend as well as time and energy).

Your dog is very important to you, are you sure that you want to risk her health or life for a litter of puppies? Complications do sometimes occur during pregnancy, birth and post-natal, and these complications can result in unfortunate consequences.

"Yes, after careful consideration, I still want to breed. What can I expect before and after the puppies are born?"

You've done your homework and found a compatible male to complement your bitch's pedigree and physical characteristics; both dogs have passed the appropriate health testing for the breed. She's in season and it's time to take her to the veterinarian for a prenatal checkup and to make sure that her vaccinations, medications and worming are up to date. Once you've bred her, she should be under veterinarian care for any illnesses and should be kept away from any dogs that might pass viruses to her. Infestations, illnesses or diseases can affect the unborn puppies. Bitches can have miscarriages. If fetal death occurs early in the pregnancy, it is usually undetected and absorbed by the mother's body. Abortion may result if fetal death occurs later in the pregnancy, and, dependent upon the cause of fetal death, the bitch may carry the remaining fetuses to term. A number of things can cause fetal death, including fetal congenital defects, the physical health of the mother, her uterus and placenta, malnutrition, anything that alters the health of the mother. This can include reproductive tract diseases and illnesses, such as cystic endometrial hyperplasia, adhesions (possibly from previous pregnancies or caesarian-sections), tumours or hormonal imbalances. Diseases known to cause fetal death include Canine Distemper Virus infection, Canine Herpes Virus infection, Toxoplasmosis, Campylobacter infection and Brucellosis (a type of Canine sexually transmitted disease).

You will still need to exercise your bitch. As the pregnancy progresses, your walks may get a bit slower. She will require about 30% more supplementary food during the last three to four weeks of her pregnancy. Now is a good time to put her on puppy food specially formulated for the needs of puppies and pregnant or lactating bitches. She may become a bit moody and depressed or she may have no changes at all, other than an increased appetite and thickening around the middle.

As the whelping date nears, she may become restless. The whelping area should be ready so that she can become accustomed to it. You may want to schedule a few days off before the whelping date so that someone is home with her at all times. Some bitches do whelp early and premature puppies are the result. Bitches should never whelp by themselves since trouble can occur and no one wants to come home to find dead puppies and/or a dead bitch.

Once whelping begins, be prepared for any problems that may occur. Dystocia is the term associated with difficulty in whelping. While uterine fatigue (inertia), due to length of labour or to lack of physical fitness prior to whelping, is probably the most common cause of dystocia, other factors may also present problems, such as puppies too large for the pelvis or vaginal canine, malpresentation (breech puppies), prolapsed uterus, prolapsed vagina, uterine torsion, or ruptured uterine. You and your veterinarian will need to determine the cause of dystocia. Proper treatment may be either administering drugs (oxytocin) to increase uterine contractions, manual assistance in delivery, or surgery (a caesarian-section).

Once those puppies are all born, there are still dangers to both the puppies and to the bitch. Eclampsia is not an extremely common disease, but it **is** life-threatening. While it is caused by low calcium levels in the blood caused by the demands of lactating, there is evidence that giving the bitch calcium during pregnancy may, in fact, predispose her to this condition. Small dogs are particularly prone to this disease. Signs to watch for during the first three weeks of nursing includes behaviour changes such as restlessness, nervousness or lack of interest in the puppies. Left untreated, the next stage can be excessive salivation, a stiff or wobbly gait, or irritability. Continued lack of treatment may result in fever, inability to stand, muscle spasms, and seizures over the next few minutes to several hours. Death may occur due to hypothermia or respiratory depression. Dogs suffering from eclampsia should be transported immediately to the veterinarian where, if consulted in time, the intravenous administration of calcium can result in rapid improvement. Recurrence can be prevented after such an episode by continuing to give oral calcium throughout the remainder of the lactation period. Calcium should be given upon a veterinarian's advice only.

Much easier to recognize, mastitis is the infection and/or inflammation of the mammary gland and may include all or just one or several glands. The affected glands become firm and hard, often resembling rocks, are very red, warm to the touch and painful. Milk may possibly be off-colour. Veterinarians are divided in their opinions as to whether nursing from these infected glands may harm the puppies. Treatment includes antibiotics, massage and manual expression of the gland, warm compresses and may also include surgical drainage and flushing.

Puppies need to be kept in a dry, warm environment that is free of drafts. Care must be taken to keep the bitch from stepping or lying upon the puppies and to ensure that each puppy is adequately cared and fed by the bitch, particularly during the critical first three weeks. Newborn puppies are also extremely susceptible to other factors, such as disease and stresses such as

physical trauma, infections from less than sanitary conditions, heavy parasite load, and congenital diseases.

Because it has been your decision to produce these puppies, it is your responsibility to make sure that they remain as healthy as possible. This means that your life for at least the first week will not be your own and, hopefully, your family will understand the stress and time constraints upon you. For those of you who are parents, think back to those first few months when it seemed as if you would never get any sleep again. Hopefully, you'll be able to count upon the support of a partner or hire someone to help you care for the puppies during this time. After the puppies are three weeks old, you will need to start teaching them to eat a type of gruel. This results in extra time spent in preparing the food, cleaning bowls, assisting the puppies, and then in cleaning the puppies after so that skin infections do not occur from left-over gruel. This is, of course, on top of the average of a **minimum** of two hours a day spent in cleaning the puppy pen, exercising and feeding the mother, handling the puppies so that they become used to people, taking the puppies to the veterinarian for a health check, worming and vaccinations, cleaning the house, etc. Over an eight week period of time, this results in a very minimum of 112 hours.

During this period of time, you will also spend time on the telephone with those people who have reserved puppies and people who want information about puppies that you may have available. This can be from fifteen minutes a day to several hours, dependent upon the people. You will also need to budget money to return phone calls that you may miss.

Once the puppies are weaned, from three to six weeks, time should be spent playing with them, cutting their toenails, carefully examining them to help accustom them to having ears, eyes, mouth looked at. Trusted people and children may come to visit the puppies, but only if you know that their dogs, if any, have been completely vaccinated and they are not carriers of any viruses. Necessary to socialize the puppies, this is also an added cost to your time and expenses, since most of us will serve food and beverage of some sort to our friends.

"People are calling about puppies, now what?"

Now the really hard people work begins of spending time with the people who call and making sure that they are suitable owners with good homes for your puppies. You have a great deal of emotional, financial, time, and energy investment in these puppies and should want to ensure that they go to the best possible homes. You carefully word your advertisements for the various dog papers and, perhaps, the dog magazines, if you can financially afford the investment. As the phone calls come in, there are definitely questions that you will want to ask the prospective buyers and questions that you should look for them to be asking you. Are you determined enough and able to turn away people from who you don't get a good feeling? Can you continue to look for good, responsible homes even when the puppies may be twelve weeks old, eating you out of house and literally home, as their little teeth tear into the woodwork, leave little stains on the carpet, and snag your best hose? Your responsibility continues even when the little imps are not quite so cute any more because the strain of late nights and extra work has worn you to a frazzle.

"What are the questions I should be asking the people who call?"

You should find out as much as possible about the people who want to purchase one of the puppies. Consider it a job interview for the life of and responsibility for the puppy. Some of the questions that you should ask are:

1. Why do they want a puppy of this breed?
2. What type of experience do they have with (insert breed here)?
3. What do they know about raising and training dogs?
4. How many dogs have they owned in their life and at what ages and how did the dogs die?
5. Have they ever gotten rid of one of their dogs and why?
6. Do they have children, other dogs, cats? If so, what are their ages?
7. Where will the dog live in the family (inside, outside, a combination of both)?
8. Do they have the facilities to keep a (insert breed here)?
9. What do they want to do with the puppy; i.e., do they want to compete with it; do they want a pet; do they want to breed later?
10. Are the puppies in this litter suitable for their needs?
11. Do they plan to spay/neuter the puppy?
12. Do they have the financial means to feed and properly maintain, including veterinarian costs, a (insert breed here)?
13. What kind of exercise will the dog get?
14. Do they have a fenced in garden?
15. Do they know about grooming the dog (especially important in coated breeds)?
16. If they are thinking of breeding later, will they do the necessary health checks and prove the worth of their dog within the breed prior to breeding?
17. Do they have a problem with signing a contract for your puppy?

A good breeder, concerned with the welfare of their puppies, will make the buyer feel as if they are adopting one of the breeder's children. Any breeder who will sell puppies without asking questions and doing all possible to guarantee that the buyer knows about
If the answers to any of these questions are vague or not to your liking, you should either decline selling them a puppy or talk to them in person and then make your decision. Remember that if they are not willing to work with you now, it is likely that they will not follow your guidelines in the future, contract or not.

"What questions should I be expecting from the buyers?"

Informed buyers are going to want to know about the background of their puppy. Be prepared to not only discuss everything you know about the sire and dam, but also everything you know about the other dogs on the pedigree. Since a good breeder has done her/his homework prior to breeding, answering those questions should prove no problem.

1. Can I see both the sire and dam of the puppies? If you don't own the sire (and this is the normal case), am I able to visit the sire's owner and see him also?
2. Tell me everything you can about the sire and dam. What are the sire's worst and best faults or traits? What are the dam's worst and best faults or traits?

3. Has this dam been bred before? When and how many litters has she had? What are the dogs from that litter(s) like?
4. How long have you had this particular breed? How knowledgeable do you consider yourself?
5. What testing has been performed on the sire and dam for genetic problems? Have they both been examined for hip dysplasia and do they have certifications? Have they both had their eyes examined and certified? Have they both had vWD testing (a blood disorder)? What about other testing? Do you have evidence of the findings of the testing and can I see the certifications? (An informed breeder will have checked about genetic problems in the breed and the answer of "Oh, they're just fine." is **not** appropriate or good enough.)
6. Do you have certifications on any of the dogs further back in the pedigree?
7. How many of the dogs in the pedigree have you seen and examined personally? Tell me everything you know about them. (Be prepared to discuss more than what is found on the pedigree – a good breeder will know about the temperaments, health, workability, etc. of the dogs in the puppies' pedigree.)
8. What can you tell me about the types of titles (conformation, working, obedience and/or agility) are in the pedigree? How far back in the pedigree do these titles occur? How many of the dogs were titled? Are you currently working on any titles, degrees or certifications with the dam and/or sire? What about with your other dogs?
9. Why did you decide to breed this particular dam to this particular sire?
10. Tell me about the incidence of dysplasia, eye problems, vWD, epilepsy, allergies, thyroid problems, growth problems, cancer, etc. in the pedigree.
11. How many puppies were born in the litter? Did any have congenital problems? If so, what were the problems?
12. How much time have you spent planning the litter? How did you determine what stud to use? Had you seen him and examined him prior to taking your bitch to him for breeding?
13. How much time have you spent with the puppies? What is your normal day like with them?
14. Has your veterinarian examined the puppies? Have they been inoculated at all? If so, for what?
15. Do you perform any temperament tests? How do you evaluate your puppies? If you temperament test, which test do you use? Did anyone temperament test the puppies? (An informed buyer will ask to see the results and you should be prepared to explain those results. If you can't explain the criteria used to evaluate puppies, what good are the evaluations?)
16. Do you have a puppy contract that I will need to sign? May I have a copy before I come to see the puppies? What does it entail?
17. Do you offer any health or temperament guarantees? What are the terms? If there is a problem, does the puppy/dog have to be returned? (While returning a dog may be very traumatic, it may sometimes be necessary. A good breeder is one who is concerned about not only their dogs and their puppies, but with the breed on a whole.) If there are any health or temperament problems, will any of my purchase money be refunded or will I get a replacement puppy from another breeding (with another sire or dam)?

18. Do you require that any companion (pet-quality) puppies be spayed or neutered? Will there be an endorsement on the registration? (Most people who want a dog for a pet will understand that a good breeder wants to ensure that only the best (those conforming to the standard and with a minimum of faults) dogs are bred.)
19. Will you be available throughout the life of the dog to answer any of my questions and concerns? Can you answer any training, food, exercise, medical questions? If you don't know an answer, do you know who I can go to for answers?
20. What documentation will I get with my puppy? Will I get a four- or five-generation pedigree? Are any medical testing results for dogs on the pedigree listed? Will I get information on how to take care of my puppy and what I should expect? Do you provide the puppy's health record? Will I get any helpful information on helping my puppy adjust to a new home and training?
21. What do you consider to be the most important facets of a breeding program? What are you striving for in your breeding program? (A good breeder will consider the entire standard, including not only the physical aspects, but also the purpose for which the breed was conceived, health and temperament. A good breeder doesn't concentrate on any one part of the standard to the exclusion of others.)
22. Tell me about your philosophy on breeding dogs in general and how it relates to this breed? Why did you breed this pair of dogs? Does this breeding match your philosophy on breeding?
23. What dog-related clubs or organizations do you belong to? How long have you belonged to them? Are you active in these clubs or organizations?
24. Do you work your dogs? Do you show? Do any of your dogs have temperament degrees (such as PAT dogs or good citizenship testings)? If not, can you explain why?
25. Can you give me references of any people who own dogs from your previous litters? May I call them?

"Whew, I didn't realize that selling puppies was this hard. Now what?"

Be prepared for those who are interested in the puppies to come over and visit before selecting their puppy. This is a good time to discuss the information in your puppy packet. What? You say that you don't have any puppy packets? You should put together useful information for the new owners. Things to include in each packet:

1. Four- or five-generation pedigree (including any certification numbers for hip, eye, vWD testing, etc.)
2. Pictures of the sire and dam (and any other pictures that you may have of dogs in the pedigree)
3. Picture of the puppy
4. Health record of the puppy, including any inoculations, worming, medical care and the phone number and address of your veterinarian
5. A copy of the breed standard
6. An application form for the breed parent club and any other clubs that you belong to

7. A list of training groups and information on puppy socialization/training classes
8. Information on the inoculations that the dog will require (a brief explanation of each of the diseases being inoculated against is always helpful and will emphasize the importance of making sure the dog has immunity)
9. Copies of brochures that you have found helpful (such as crate training, leash training, helping the puppy adjust to a new home, housetraining, etc.)
10. Recommendations of feeding schedules and types of food
11. A list of references
12. Puppy contract (this is very important; everyone should have some type of contract to stress the importance and responsibility of dog ownership, as well as what you expect from the buyer and what the buyer can expect from you, and information of what you expect to happen if the buyer finds that he cannot keep the dog at any time in the dog's life)
13. Information from the Kennel Club about dog ownership and responsibility

Sit down and talk about the dogs, the pedigree and dogs in it. Introduce the people to your other dogs. You'll want to see how they react to adult dogs with all the size, slobber, coat (hair on their clothes), boisterousness, etc. These reactions will tell you a lot about how they will be able to deal with that cute little bundle of fur when it becomes full-grown and not quite so easily cuddled. They should be able to see the mother separate from the puppies. If the puppies are very young, you may wish to have them look in at the puppies but not touch them. It is always recommended that before you have anyone touching the puppies that you first make sure that any dog they may now own has been fully inoculated. In the States it is not uncommon for a breeder to ask that the buyers have not visited any other litters or dogs on that particular day before seeing the puppies. Puppies are very vulnerable and the last thing that you will want is a virus brought into your home.

You may, as a matter of course, serve tea, coffee and desserts, during the time the people visit. Be sure to add those into the [cost](#) of raising a litter of puppies for sale. Multiply the time spent with one puppy buyer by number of puppies in the litter and you will see that time is a serious factor in deciding whether to breed.

"What happens if there aren't buyers for all the puppies?"

A breeder must have the space and financial resources to take care of any puppies that are not sold. This means, of course, that the breeder must start the housetraining and socialization, as well as further veterinarian costs for inoculations and worming. Not all puppies are sold quickly, unless one is not careful about the homes that the puppies will go to and are willing to sell them to whoever rings up. It is not uncommon to have one or two puppies remaining at even twelve or sixteen weeks. Puppies at a young age require a great deal of time; housebreaking and socialization takes up even more time. As a breeder, you are responsible for making sure that the puppies are as well-socialized as possible to prevent future problems from occurring. Puppies cannot just be placed in a kennel and forgotten about except at feeding time. It means toe nail trimming, ear cleaning, baths, teaching them to walk on leashes, meet people, car rides, etc. If you are not prepared to take on the responsibility of extra puppies for an extended amount of time, you should seriously consider whether you should be breeding.

"Yikes, it's two years later and Mr. Smith is being transferred to Timbuktu and can't take Fido. Now what?"

That puppy which is now a two-year-old dog is still your responsibility. Mr. Smith may not have done any socialization or training and Fido may hate small children, but you, as a breeder, should be taking Fido back for rehoming. This often means that you will incur additional expenses, such as training classes, veterinarian costs (Mr. Smith didn't take Fido anywhere so he didn't bother with the inoculations even though you told him that it was mandatory), additional food costs, as well as lots of your time. It means having the means to separate Fido out from your other dogs until they become acquainted and finding the right home for him all over again. It doesn't matter whether the scenario is that Mr. Smith is getting a divorce, the 'puppy' got too big (even though he saw all the adult dogs and Fido is actually the smallest male you've seen), or the new Mrs. Smith hates the dog or his new stepson is allergic to dogs. Some dogs are even returned to the breeders as old dogs because their owners just couldn't bear the idea of them being sick and needing to be put down. Breeding is not just a four-month proposition (between breeding and whelping). It is a lifetime responsibility.

Conclusion

Mating your dog is not something to lightly undertake. One important thing to remember is that the Kennel Club registration does not guarantee that the dog has been well-bred by a caring, conscientious breeder who has strived mightily to ensure that her dogs are as free as possible from genetic disorders and conforms to the breed standard on working ability, structure, temperament, and purpose. That piece of paper does not mean that every dog should be bred. Indeed, only a small fraction of dogs should ever be bred. Any person who cannot breed to the standard and only to better the breed is not deserving of the name of breeder. Those who cannot manage to breed the right way (which means the betterment of the breed in its entirety and not just one characteristic should try raising snails instead.

Design-a-doggers and puppy-raisers do just as much harm as puppy mills and backyard breeders. In some cases, the damage is even greater because these people can talk well, but just can't meet the exacting criteria of someone who has dedicated themselves to the task of safeguarding and improving the dogs that they love.

Some breeders lose the distinction of breeder and join the ranks of backyard breeders, puppy farmers, and even the design-a-dog category (by intensifying on one or several traits rather than the overall standard) when they lose track of the objective of breeding which should be solely and entirely ***the betterment of the breed***. These are often wonderful people who at one time and held the greatest respect through their ability to breed with the future in mind, having a plan and a goal. Having worked hard to get the respect and become true breeders, these breeders gave up somewhere along the line, believing that everything they produced was the best without clearly looking at where they were going. Many of these people now simply put dog A with dog B because they own them or they are top winning dogs and they don't bother to look beyond. Breeders cannot afford to sit upon their laurels, nor can they simply start looking at each litter as a way to pick up a bit of money and start compromising their integrity and reputation by cutting corners. It's a tough life that we, as breeders, have, but it is one that we have chosen and to do less than our very best each time is not only neglectful to our dogs, but

is dishonest to the breed and dog world in general, as well as those who trust that we live up to our reputation.

Breeding for any one trait is irresponsible breeding. Breeding to make a bit of money is irresponsible breeding. Breeding to simply produce dogs and fulfill a market is irresponsible breeding. Breeding without doing everything possible to ensure healthy puppies and dogs is irresponsible breeding.

Make sure you don't join the ranks of the irresponsible.

Copyright 2001 Sierra Milton. sierra.milton@ntlworld.com Reprinted with permission.